

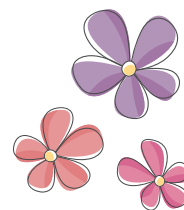


Cochlear Implant Center
**Westchester
Medical Center**
Westchester Medical Center Health Network



CochlearConnections

News from the Cochlear Implant Center | Spring–Summer 2025



Cochlear Implant Center

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The Cochlear Implant Center at Westchester Medical Center, flagship of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth), provides coordinated audiology and speech-therapy services for cochlear implant patients and those considering this life-changing technology. It is the only center between New York City and Albany providing comprehensive services for children and adult patients.

The Cochlear Implant Center is staffed by a team of highly trained audiologists and speech pathologists with expertise in evaluation and rehabilitation services for individuals who are cochlear implant candidates and those who receive a cochlear implant. Cochlear implantation is a highly successful technology that allows deaf children to hear and speak, and enables deafened adults to enhance their lives. The Cochlear Implant Center provides comprehensive services such as individualized programming of the implant and speech-therapy services.



**Westchester
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Advancing Care. Here.

WestchesterMedicalCenter.org

Educational Advocacy Parent/Child Event Spring 2025

On April 6, 2025, the WMC Cochlear Implant Center (CIC) hosted our biennial Educational Advocacy Parent Seminar and social event, **"What it Takes: The Family Role in Cochlear Implant Success."** This event was sponsored by Partners in Hearing as part of an educational advocacy series for our cochlear implant (CI) recipients and their families.

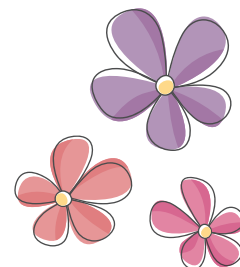


Parents attended a lecture focusing on promoting educational success for children with hearing loss. A parent panel also offered a dedicated Question and Answer session on what it means to be the parent of a child with hearing loss. During these sessions, children were invited to socialize with other CI recipients and participate in crafts and fun activities. From scavenger hunts to face painting, it was a delight to see so many smiling faces and wonderful interactions.

(continued on page 7)



Patient Perspective: **Zoe Heron**



You received your first, left cochlear implant (CI) at the age of 10 and your second, right CI just nine months later. What were your feelings about undergoing the second surgery after knowing how you felt after the first one?

For the second one, I wasn't as nervous as I was for the first one because I got used to the first CI quickly. After the first surgery, my ear hurt a lot more than it did with the second one and it was much more uncomfortable.

How has having two cochlear implants been different than when you only had one?

Having two cochlear implants has been different because I'm able to hear better and don't have to keep asking people to repeat themselves like I did before.

Since receiving bilateral cochlear implants, how has school and socializing at school changed for you?

School has been good! I don't always have to ask the teacher to repeat everything. I have my interpreters there, but I'm able to follow along even if I don't look at them for a few minutes. Socializing has been about the same. I'm still shy, so mostly people just come up to me to talk and be my friend. I am pretty well-known, like when I had my hearing aids. Sometimes people will walk by and say, "Hi, Zoe!" and I have no idea who they are. Now, I can hear the "hi" better and will say "hi" back. But I don't consider myself popular (giggles).

How has your appreciation for music changed since transitioning from hearing aids to cochlear implants?

My appreciation for music has changed significantly. Back then, I couldn't really hear half the words in a song. Now, I can hear most of the lyrics without having to look at captions. I like Indie music such as Olivia Rodrigo, and Gracie Abrams. Before, I didn't really have a favorite. I also have over a thousand songs on my playlist. I always listen to music before I go to sleep, and it doesn't bother anyone since it's playing directly from my processors.

With bilateral cochlear implants, can you still use FaceTime and talk on the phone with your friends?

Yeah (giggles). I can talk to my friends on all of my devices. My cochlear implants automatically connect when anyone calls. I can just talk now or do other things while I'm talking because I don't have to focus on reading lips. I speak to my friends the same as I did before when I had hearing aids, but it's more understandable now. They used to sound very low before, but now their voices sound the same as when I'm talking to them in person.

Do you wear your processors while playing sports? If so, how do your implants help make you a better athlete, and how do you ensure they stay on while playing?

I do, but not my left one because it sometimes falls off since we changed the magnet. Now, I can hear what's going on around me and hear what my teammates are saying. They usually stay on for the most part, except for the left one. It comes off mostly during jumping activities. Sometimes, I put my hair in a low ponytail, and that helps keep both in place.



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Westchester/Rockland Walk4Hearing

On Saturday, May 17th, WMCHealth's Cochlear Implant (CI) Center Team joined the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Westchester/Rockland Chapter's Walk4Hearing. This annual event aims to raise awareness about hearing loss and generate funds for programs that support individuals with hearing loss.

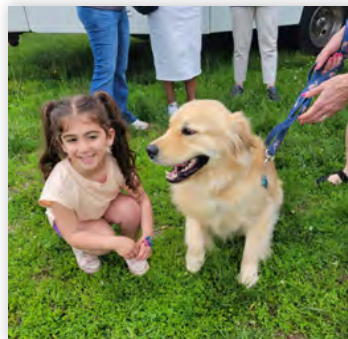
WMCHealth was honored to once again be a Gold Level sponsor for this event. What was predicted to be a cloudy, rainy day turned out to be filled with beautiful blue skies and sunshine!

This year's walk included 162 participants from 23 teams! Our team consisted of WMC CI Center staff, patients' families and friends. We were thrilled to provide hearing screenings to 35 walk participants using the WMCHealth Mobile Medical Unit.

We had a great time and already look forward to seeing you next year!



To learn more about HLAA's impactful initiatives, please scan the QR code at left or visit www.hearingloss.org.





American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACIA) CI2025 Boston

The team of professionals from Westchester Medical Center's Cochlear Implant Center traveled to Boston during the first week of May for the American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACIA) CI2025 meeting. The annual ACIA meeting provides an opportunity for cochlear implant professionals from around the world to share the latest in research and technological innovations. This year's conference was an occasion for the WMCHHealth Cochlear Implant Center team to meet and collaborate with colleagues from across the country, as well as to present our Center's research.

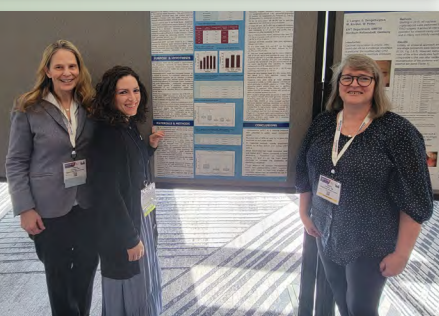
This year, our team delivered more presentations and posters than in previous years, highlighting our continued commitment to innovation and excellence. Dr. Katrina Stidham, Chief of Otology, Neurotology, Skull Base Surgery and Director of the Cochlear Implant Center, gave multiple platform presentations focused on intraoperative cochlear implant monitoring. She was also invited to share her experience with IOTAMOTION's robotic-assisted cochlear implant insertion, as well as her use of Cochlear America's SmartNav intraoperative monitoring software.

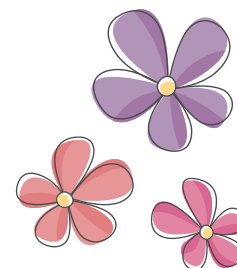
One of the Center audiologists, Dr. Rivka Bornstein, was invited to present the clinical perspective of using Advanced Bionics' AIM system, which allows for both intraoperative and postoperative monitoring of the cochlear implant. Dr. Rivka Bornstein also presented highlights from a recently published study coauthored by members of the Cochlear Implant Center team in collaboration with medical students from New York Medical College, entitled "The Feasibility of Intraoperative Electrically Evoked Stapedial Reflex Thresholds."

Finally, Speech Pathologist and Auditory Verbal Therapist, Michelle Albera along with Dr. Bornstein, presented a poster discussing the results of group aural rehabilitation sessions for patients with single-sided deafness or asymmetric hearing loss.

The WMCHHealth Cochlear Implant Center is proud to be an American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACIA) Organizational Member. The ACIA is a not-for-profit organization created to help eliminate barriers to cochlear implantation. The ACIA sponsors research and actively advocates for improved access to cochlear implants for patients of all ages. Its members include clinicians, scientists, educators as well as patient and consumer advocates. Dr. Stidham continues to serve as an ACIA New York State Champion, working with the ACIA to help effect policy changes for individuals with hearing loss at both the state and national levels.

The American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACIA) is currently working with centers and agencies across the country to support ongoing funding of important hearing-related programs. For more information about the ACIA and to find out how to become an advocate, visit their website at www.acialliance.org.





Staff Spotlight: **Citlali Cruz Rodriguez**

PERSONAL ROLE & EXPERIENCE

What is your role at the Cochlear Implant Center/Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) and how long have you been with the team?

My role started in 2019 with a dual position as Medical Assistant and Surgical Coordinator. I have fully transitioned to the role of Surgical Coordinator for Dr. Katrina Stidham and Dr. David Garber, and I've been in this position for about three years now.

What do you love most about your job?

I honestly love everything about my job. Each day brings a new learning experience, even on the tough days. It keeps me growing, challenged and constantly engaged.

What makes working at the Cochlear Implant Center special or unique for you?

It's truly an honor to be part of this department, which has a meaningful impact on patients with hearing loss. It provides a unique perspective on life.

FUN & UNEXPECTED

What's something about you that would surprise your coworkers?

I love driving up to the Adirondack Mountains and trying out different hiking trails. There is so much to see and explore.

If you could switch roles with anyone in the center for a day, who would it be and why?

I would switch with an Audiologist. I think I would enjoy experiencing the activation process for the babies and young children Dr. Stidham implants. It must be such a rewarding experience for both the Audiologist and the patient when they hear sounds for the first time.

What's your favorite part of the workday?

My favorite part of the day is taking a lunch break to unwind and recharge.

LIFE OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

What do you enjoy doing when you're not at the Cochlear Implant Center/ Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT)?

I enjoy the outdoors, hiking, biking, walking on the trails and sitting at the beach listening to the waves.

Do you have any hobbies, secret talents, or creative passions?

Hiking has become one of my favorite hobbies. I also love baking and do-it-yourself (DIY) projects.

RAPID FIRE (LIGHT & FUN)

Favorite snack at your desk?

Party mix chips, Chex Mix and chocolate chip cookies.

Coffee or tea?

Coffee (French Vanilla).

What song always gets you dancing?

"Stayin' Alive" and "Night Fever" by the Bee Gees.

If you could travel anywhere tomorrow, where would you go?

I would love to go to Jerusalem, Israel.

Complete the sentence:

I'm surprisingly good at baking.
Everyone says I work too hard.



Your Hearing Journey — When Hearing Aids Are Not Enough

In March, the Cochlear Implant Center at Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMC Health), in collaboration with IOTAMotion, hosted a live webinar on hearing loss and when to consider a cochlear implant (CI).



This educational session featured a presentation by Dr. Katrina Stidham, Chief Otolaryngology, Neurotology and Skull Base Surgery and Director of the Cochlear Implant Program and Balance Center, along with a candid account from Janice Silverberg, a CI recipient who shared her experience with receiving a cochlear implant. Janice underwent the procedure last summer using the new robotic-assisted insertion technology.

The webinar was designed for individuals experiencing hearing loss who are interested in learning more about cochlear implants and the robotic insertion process. Attendees shared that the session helped them better understand the procedure and evaluate the next steps in their hearing journey.



To access the recorded webinar, please scan the QR Code.



LEAN ON ME

Manufacturer Support for Candidates and Recipients

Get to know your Manufacturer Support Team!

Do you have questions about candidacy? Interested in learning about cochlear implants and the new technology being offered? Reach out to an Engagement Manager!

Looking to learn more about the accessories available for your processor?

Do you desire a better understanding of your current accessory? Reach out to your Recipient Solutions Manager!



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Phonak

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Follow Us!

WMC Cochlear Implant Center is excited to announce... We are on Instagram!
Follow us and be part of the conversation.

The Cochlear Implant Center at WMC is making strides. Support our content, participate in surveys, and receive real-time updates tailored to our patient population. Engage with your Audiologist and Speech therapist. Read articles that will keep you informed about cochlear implant research and fun reads too!



@WMC_COCHLEARIMPLANTCENTER

UPCOMING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

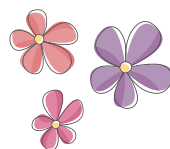
Cochlear Implant Center Educational Seminar

Friday, January 30, 2026 | New York Medical College

The Cochlear Implant Center will be hosting a Professional Educational Seminar series, a specialized professional development event designed for Speech-Language Pathologists, Audiologists, School Psychologists, Special Educators and other professionals who support children with hearing loss.

What to Expect:

- Clinical updates on cochlear implant candidacy, evaluation, and outcomes
- Educational strategies to support students with cochlear implants
- Guidance on supporting listening and spoken language development in school settings
- Multidisciplinary case studies and collaborative discussion
- Insights into social development challenges faced by children with hearing loss



This seminar is a great opportunity to deepen your understanding of the cochlear implant process and how-to best support learners in educational settings. Opportunities to earn CEUs/professional development credits will be available. Spread the word to any professionals who work with you or your child! More details to come.

A Month of Learning



This Spring, we were thrilled to host Jordan Skeete, a graduate student from Iona University, as part of her participation in the Interdisciplinary Advanced Certificate Program (IACD). This specialized program prepares future professionals to provide speech therapy and educational services to children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH).

In May, Jordan spent time working closely with Michelle Albero, SLP-AVT, at the WMC Cochlear Implant Center. She actively observed and participated in auditory-verbal

and aural rehabilitation sessions, gaining hands-on experience with a wide range of patients. Jordan went above and beyond by coming in every day to make the most of her learning experience.

We are so proud of Jordan's hard work and enthusiasm, and we wish her the very best as she begins her first job during her clinical fellowship year!

*Educational Advocacy
(continued from page 1)*



The Cochlear Implant Center team extends sincere thanks to everyone who volunteered their time and knowledge, especially Eileen Solla Diaz and Miriam Chunir, who participated in the Parent Panel, along with representatives from Advanced Bionics, Cochlear Americas, Med-El and students from New York Medical College.

Special thanks to Pamela Talbot, M.Ed., CCC-SLP, LSLS Cert AVT, for her informative presentation and to Partners in Hearing for supporting the Center's mission.

The Cochlear Implant Center recognizes that it takes a team to foster success. Each of you contributed to making this event possible.





Are you traveling by airplane anytime soon? Here are a few tips and ideas!

Traveling with hearing loss can be challenging, but that's no reason to miss out on discovering new places or visiting your loved ones! Follow these flying tips to help ensure a safe and smooth travel experience.

Prepare Ahead of Time:

- Download all relevant airline apps onto your smartphone before you go. Make sure to add your travel information into the app. Most airlines have their own apps, which include timetables and provide alerts for gate changes or delays. Practice using the apps before your trip so you're prepared in case you encounter any issues.
- Try booking your seat near the flight crew in case of emergencies.
- Note: Airlines do not allow individuals with hearing loss to sit in the exit row seats for safety reasons.



At the Airport:

- Always approach the gate agent to let them know you are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) and explain that you may have difficulty hearing any announcements or delays.
- Always ask to "pre-board," and they will direct you to sit by the gate to inform you of any changes ahead of time.

Why is pre-boarding necessary for Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals?

- You can still pre-board with your hearing family members, this is always allowed.
- Pre-boarding allows DHH individuals the time and space to advocate for themselves and communicate with the flight crew about their hearing loss. For your own safety, things can go wrong, and it's helpful to receive any changes in flight or travel information directly from the crew.
- Once you're on the airplane, request visual communication and familiarize yourself with the exit and layout of the plane.
- Pre-boarding will help ease any travel anxiety when traveling alone or even with family members who have normal hearing.

WMC Cochlear Implant Center Partners with HLAA

This past March, the Cochlear Implant Center partnered with the Westchester Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) to host an engaging and informative event focused on advancements in cochlear implant (CI) care. Dr. Katrina Stidham, Chief of Otology, Neurotology, Skull Base Surgery and Director of the Cochlear Implant Center presented the latest surgical and technological updates, including her innovative use of robotic-assisted procedures. Speech Pathologist and Auditory Verbal Therapist, Michelle Albera, emphasized the importance of aural rehabilitation and shared helpful apps and online resources for at-home listening practice. The event provided attendees with an opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, and build community. It was a well-received gathering for all participants.

