UAMS, Ronald McDonald Charities of Arkansas Announce Construction of New Rooms for Families of Preemies

LITTLE ROCK — Parents of babies in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) will be able to be present and involved in their child’s hospitalization through creation of a Ronald McDonald Family Room, announced today by UAMS and Ronald McDonald House Charities of Arkansas (RMHCA).

In a partnership between UAMS and the charity, a 2,000-square-foot space on the fifth floor of UAMS Medical Center will be renovated and operated by RMHCA. The new space will feature up to four overnight rooms for parents and siblings of patients in the UAMS NICU and a common area for day use by up to 64 NICU families.

This will be the first Ronald McDonald Family Room in central Arkansas. It will include a kitchen, dining and family area, and laundry and provide a quiet space so parents can be in the best position to make vital decisions for their baby. Construction will begin this summer and is expected to begin serving families by the end of the year. RMHCA will also provide staff to work with families staying overnight.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Arkansas has provided a “home-away-from-home” for over 37,000 families since 1980.

“We want to bring our commitment and expertise to the heart of where it is needed most, the NICU,” says RMHCA Board Chair Diana Smithson. “As a founder of the first Ronald McDonald House once said, ‘A family with a sick child is a sick family.’ In partnership with UAMS, our new Family Room will take care of the needs of the whole family.”

Studies show that family involvement in patient care in the NICU reduces parental stress, anxiety and depression; improves maternal-infant bonding and breastfeeding; and eases the transition to care at home after discharge from the hospital.
UAMS is excited to be able to expand services for families of preemies, said Richard H. Turnage, M.D., senior vice chancellor for clinical programs and chief executive officer of UAMS Medical Center.

“We designed our neonatal floor with families in mind, and over the past 10 years we have seen how babies and their parents benefit from spending time together in the first weeks of life. This partnership with Ronald McDonald House brings an opportunity for siblings to stay overnight with their parents for the first time,” Turnage said.

UAMS serve families from across Arkansas, and babies often stay in the NICU for weeks or months. While parents have been able to stay with their infants in their room, the NICU has not been able to accommodate overnight stays by families with older children inside the hospital. The neonatal unit has 58 patient rooms and can serve up to 64 patients at a time.

“We are delighted to partner with UAMS to create a Ronald McDonald Family Room just steps from the NICU,” said Janell Mason, executive director of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Arkansas. “Our five-story Ronald McDonald House served more than 1,200 families last year from UAMS, Arkansas Children’s Hospital and Baptist Health Medical Center. Creating this new program at UAMS will enable more families to stay together with their other children, experience the comforts of home, enjoy a good night’s rest, and allow them to better focus on the care of their infant. We couldn’t be more excited.”

Funding of the Ronald McDonald Family Room is currently at $597,000 thanks to Windgate Charitable Foundation, Clark Family Foundation, Inc., local McDonald’s owners, The J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation, and RMHC Global. The total project cost, including the first three years of operating support is $910,000. To donate or for more information, contact Emily Piechocki, RMHCA Development Director, at emily@rmhcarkansas.org.

Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Arkansas is a locally funded and operated non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of children and their families by creating and supporting programs that directly improve the health and well-being of children.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram.

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