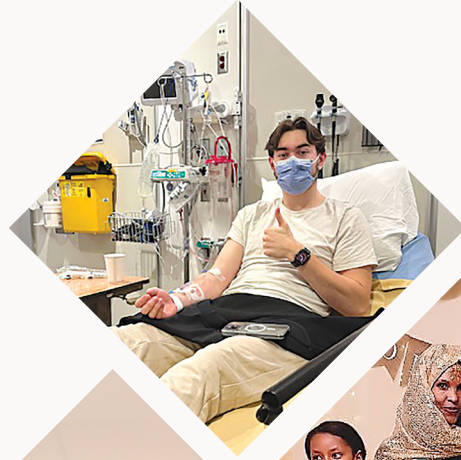




Health Sciences Centre  
**FOUNDATION**

Donor Impact Report 2025

# Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit





## Background

# From Crisis to Care

## How HSC Foundation Donors Transformed Thoracic Treatment in Manitoba

**In 2017, HSC Foundation donors came together to support the establishment of a new clinic aimed at enhancing thoracic care** at HSC, addressing the alarming and rising wait times for patients.

The incidence of lung and esophageal cancers has been increasing in Manitoba, with lung cancer being the leading cause of cancer death in Canada and esophageal cancer having one of the lowest survival rates.

Early detection and treatment are vital for improving patient outcomes in lung and esophageal cancers. Prior to the opening of the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit, HSC struggled with capacity for diagnosis and treatment. Patients faced long waits in the Emergency Department for complications, and scheduled surgeries were often delayed.

**Driven by her late husband Wilf's battle with esophageal cancer and in response to this growing challenge, volunteer Mavis Taillieu led a campaign to establish a new, state-of-the-art clinic.** With the vision of Dr. Larry Tan, HSC's Head of Thoracic Surgery at the time, the campaign quickly gained support.

**Friends and associates of the Taillieu family, along with many other Manitobans moved by Wilf's story and their personal experiences, donated \$3.275 million in under a year.** With fundraising efforts completed by 2018, **the clinic opened in July 2019** and was officially unveiled in November 2019.

Thanks to the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit, wait times are drastically reduced, and care has significantly improved for patients with esophageal cancer, lung cancer, and other thoracic conditions.

# One of HSC's greatest success stories

## A message from our Chair and President & CEO

It's been over five years since we opened the doors to the state-of-the-art Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit at Health Sciences Centre—thanks to the support of donors like you.

We share this update on the unit's progress with pride, gratitude, and awe. Our remarkable surgeons and staff are setting the standard for thoracic care in North America, performing many timely life-saving and life-enhancing procedures each and every week.

**The Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit stands alone as the only consolidated thoracic surgery and endoscopy clinic in Canada—a testament to the incredible strides we've made in delivering exceptional care.** By streamlining diagnosis and treatment, it provides **quicker care and significantly improves patient outcomes.** This leadership has earned the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit national recognition, becoming **the envy of other thoracic programs across the country.**

**For many thoracic patients, the unit has enabled same-day procedures without the need to spend any nights in hospital.** The shorter wait times have meant less distress and fewer long visits to the Emergency Department. Simply put, the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit has been a game-changer and one of HSC's greatest success stories.

What makes this achievement even more remarkable is its foundation in philanthropy. It's a **shining example of how your generosity drives innovation at HSC, shaping the future of health care.** The unit's success has informed and inspired other important developments at HSC, including the

generational, hospital-wide Operation Excellence campaign. The campaign's vision is to reduce surgical wait times and provide even better care by moving as many surgeries as possible from conventional operating rooms to clinic spaces equipped with minimally invasive surgical technology—just like the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.

The impact you have had as a donor to this campaign—so expertly led by our dear friend Mavis Taillieu—is even greater than we could have foreseen. That's what leadership and innovation look like, and together, we're making it happen.

Thank you for your support, your enthusiasm, and for your passion for the community.

**Tina Jones, C.M., O.M.**  
Chair, Board of Directors

**Jonathon Lyon**  
President & Chief Executive Officer

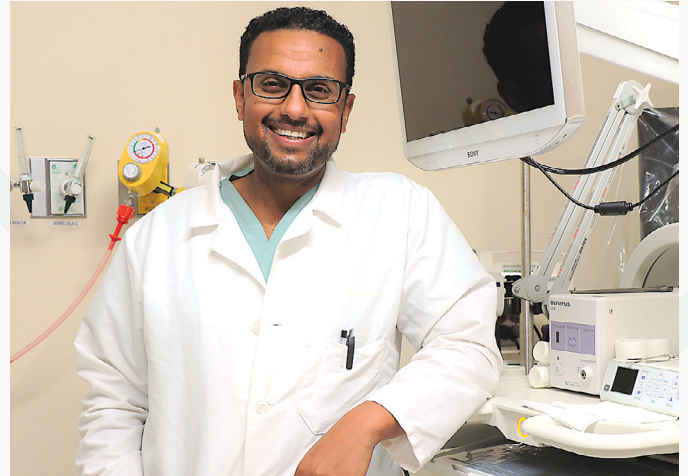


“To know that this initiative has saved lives, relieved stress in the system, and inspired exciting new developments throughout HSC is very gratifying. Our family is eternally grateful for your support of the HSC Foundation.”

-**Mavis Taillieu**, Campaign Lead, Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit



Sadeesh Srinathan, MD, MSc, FRCS(C), FRCS(CTh)  
Professor and Head, Section of Thoracic Surgery



Biniam Kidane, MD, MSc, FRCS(C)  
Medical Director, Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit

## Reflections by Dr. Sadeesh Srinathan and Dr. Biniam Kidane

### We have the space; we have the time.

Early last year, we received a call from a fellow physician about a patient in his thirties who lives about three hours away from HSC. The young man was unwell and panicking, concerned that his chest discomfort and breathing issues were symptomatic of lung cancer. His doctor was concerned, too.

Before July 2019, this patient probably would have had to wait three or four weeks for an initial assessment, and then another few weeks for a biopsy to diagnose his condition. Today, though, the reality is much different.

Thanks to your support of the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit, we were able to see this rural patient in a matter of days and perform the biopsy during the initial visit. The results came back a week later showing that he did not have cancer, but a condition which was quite treatable. This amazing unit you helped fund saved this young man and his family many weeks of stress and worry.

For patients who do have cancers and other serious thoracic conditions, the unit has been a remarkable enhancement to care, helping patients live their best lives.

**The unit can accommodate over 10,000 appointments a year while giving us the flexibility to see urgent cases within days—often the same day. We have the space, we have the time, we have the equipment, and we have exceptional nurses, aides, clerks, and surgeons working together to improve care.**

Thanks to your generosity, we have been able to acquire leading-edge, minimally invasive surgical equipment that is incredibly effective for many of the patients we treat. We have been able to expand from two to six surgeons, we have more opportunities to learn from each other, and we have more flexibility to adopt new procedures and approaches. We are in an excellent position to embrace innovations in thoracic medicine, including robotic surgery, advanced diagnostics, and the use of robust data to support decision-making and patient care.

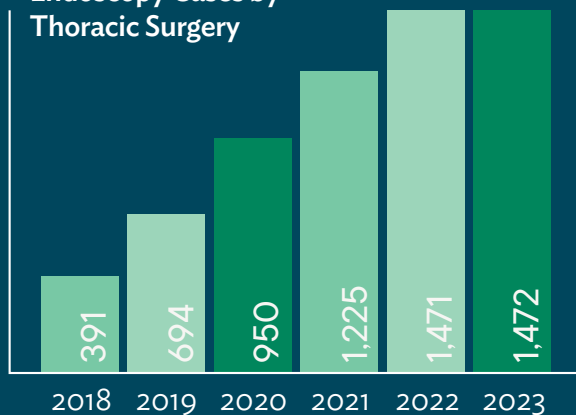
**The gift you made to the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit campaign has had a significant impact. The entire Section of Thoracic Surgery is grateful for the privilege of serving our patients with your help. Thanks to you, innovation is becoming routine. And thanks to you, our patients are having better outcomes than ever before.**

**Sadeesh Srinathan**, MD, MSc, FRCS(C), FRCS(CTh)  
Professor and Head, Section of Thoracic Surgery

**Biniam Kidane**, MD, MSc, FRCS(C)  
Medical Director, Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit

## Statistics

### Endoscopy Cases by Thoracic Surgery



2018

VS.

2023



Total Clinic Visits

7,283



Total Clinic Visits

9,256



Total Procedures

524

(average of 10 per week)



Total Procedures

1,275

(average of 24 per week)

## Five more years



Rev. Donna J. Smalley and her husband "Mike" Smalley (right) with Dr. Richard Liu (left). Rev. Donna J. Smalley and Mike generously donated \$5,000 in February 2024 to commemorate this important anniversary.

"February 26, 2024, marked the fifth anniversary of my esophagectomy surgery. Five more years of life, thanks to the wonderful surgeons and staff of the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit. As the gastroscopy procedures will be ongoing for me, I am confident that the excellence, care, and compassion from Dr. Liu and the Thoracics staff will continue. I'm also planning on being around for another five years!"

-Rev. Donna J. Smalley, HSC Foundation donor and thoracic surgery patient

"I was in and out of the hospital (tumour-free) in just 11 hours."



Yolande Trudel at her home in St. Malo.

"Early in July 2023, I was walking the halls of my apartment building with a friend to get our exercise and I found myself short of breath. I went in for a scan and it showed that my trachea was shrinking. It was devastating news, but it was news I had heard once before.

About eight years earlier, I had similar symptoms and I needed major surgery at Health Sciences Centre to remove a tumour. The surgery was successful, but the recovery was difficult. I spent six days in the hospital with an epidural for pain relief. After I was discharged, I needed 27 rounds of radiation—and then a second surgery. It was a long process, but I healed.

I was worried that my 2023 diagnosis would mean a similar journey. Major surgery followed by a long, uncomfortable recovery. I've never been happier to be wrong! **Thanks to surgeon Dr. Biniam Kidane, the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit, and a piece of equipment called an argon plasma generator, I was in and out of the hospital (tumour-free) in just 11 hours. Not days. Hours."**

-Yolande Trudel, thoracic surgery patient

**“I went home the very next day and regained my ability to eat almost immediately.”**

“I had trouble swallowing for a few years, but it wasn’t until 2018 when the strain built to an intolerable level. My family doctor referred me to Dr. Biniyam Kidane, a thoracic surgeon at HSC Winnipeg.

After a round of tests, **Dr. Kidane discovered I had Zenker’s diverticulum, a pouch that forms at the beginning of the digestive tract.** The pouch formed because the muscle between my throat and esophagus would not relax while swallowing. Because of this, **food would get stuck in my throat or pouch, causing regurgitation. If left untreated, I ran the risk of aspiration pneumonia**—an infection from food and saliva getting trapped in my lungs—choking, malnutrition among other horrible outcomes.

Dr. Kidane carefully explained my options, and shortly after, he performed a Z-POEM procedure—a new, highly specialized, non-invasive technique. Thanks to Dr. Kidane—a renowned thoracic surgeon and one of the few doctors who perform this procedure in North America—I went home the very next day and regained my ability to eat almost immediately.

**Prior to 2018, I would have had open surgery where my neck would have been cut to find the pouch. Thanks to HSC Foundation donors, I received a procedure that was more precise, with less recovery time, fewer complications, less pain—and freed up the operating room and staff resources as this procedure now happens in the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.**

Dr. Kidane’s presence put me at ease during this difficult time. He and the health care team were professional and kind—Dr. Kidane even gave me his direct number in case I had any concerns. I am grateful for his work and I am grateful for donors like you who support innovation in health care.”

**Bereket Ezuz, thoracic surgery patient**

Bereket Ezuz with his wife and daughters.



## A Seven-Month Journey

### Twenty-year-old patient battles and beats a rare cancer

Evan Rees is back to getting in shape, lifting weights, and playing beer league hockey. Not bad for a guy who had a big piece of his lung removed in June 2024.

“I still haven’t wrapped my head around the fact I had cancer in the first place,” says Rees, an athletic therapy student at the University of Manitoba.

Rees’s health challenges started in early 2023 with a diagnosis of pneumonia. Throughout the year, he had a few more bouts of pneumonia that were always treated with antibiotics. Along the way, he also experienced severe back pain that wouldn’t go away. After a few emergency room visits to a city hospital, doctors ordered a **CT scan that showed a tumour in his left lung.** He was transferred to Health Sciences Centre for further investigation and care.

Rees underwent a **biopsy and an endobronchial ultrasound bronchoscopy (EBUS) in the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.**

**“It was fast and organized at the clinic, with no waiting once I got there. There was no time to panic or be nervous,” says Rees. “The EBUS isn’t fun, but I felt very confident the whole time.”**

By February, the diagnosis was known. Dr. Larry Tan informed Rees that he had a very rare cancer, similar in type to a clear cell salivary gland carcinoma. The tumour was on his bronchus, an airway that leads from the trachea to a lung. No air was passing through, which explained the frequent pneumonias and back pain. The good news was that the cancer was contained and hadn’t spread.

**Rees started three rounds of chemotherapy in April and was scheduled for surgery in June with Dr. Tan who removed the lower lobe of Rees’s left lung and re-attached the upper part of the lung to the airway.**

**“The staff at HSC was amazing, especially the nurses in the surgical step-down unit,”** says a grateful Rees, reflecting on his 12-day hospital stay. “They walked with me up and down the hallway. I needed the help because I was weak and connected to a chest tube and an IV. Everyone at HSC cared about my treatment and I had a really good sense all along that everyone was working as a team.”

In a follow-up appointment with Dr. Tan in August, Rees heard the words that he was longing to hear from the moment the tumour was first discovered seven months earlier: “You are cancer-free.”

There are still some follow-up appointments on Rees’s calendar, but he’s feeling good, feeling strong, and feeling grateful. And he has a few words to share with other young adults:

**“If you get a rough diagnosis, don’t get into your head too much. Listen to your docs. And if you have to go to HSC, they will take amazing care of you.”**

Evan Rees was diagnosed with a very rare cancer after undergoing a biopsy and an endobronchial ultrasound bronchoscopy in the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.



Dr. Gilly Akhtar-Danesh  
in the Wilf Taillieu  
Thoracic Surgery Clinic  
and Endoscopy Unit.

## Donor-Funded Upgrades Attract Thoracic Surgeon to HSC

Dr. Gilly Akhtar-Danesh: “Being able to conduct biopsies and staging tests—all in one appointment—makes the diagnostic process smoother and improves patient outcomes.”

With a master’s degree in surgical robotics from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Dr. Gilly Akhtar-Danesh is a dynamic thoracic surgeon who was drawn to HSC because of the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit. Dr. Akhtar-Danesh was also drawn to HSC because of the minimally invasive surgical equipment that has been acquired through the HSC Foundation’s Operation Excellence campaign.

Recruited in 2023, Dr. Akhtar-Danesh is combining the clinic’s state-of-the-art technology with her extensive training in advanced thoracic procedures to expand treatment options and optimize patient outcomes.

“It’s unique to have your own dedicated thoracic endoscopy unit. Most other thoracic centres in Canada don’t have anything like this,” she explains. “It’s essential for helping patients navigate their diagnostic journey quickly and efficiently.”

Previously, thoracic procedures at HSC relied heavily on the hospital’s operating rooms, which are in high demand. This often led to long wait times and surgeries being bumped frequently when more urgent or life-threatening cases arose.

The new clinic and its advanced equipment allow for faster diagnoses and enable many procedures to be performed in the clinic as opposed to an operating room. This upgrade has reduced the strain on OR availability and reduced the number of visits patients are required to make to HSC.







According to Dr. Akhtar-Danesh, having a dedicated unit is particularly important at HSC due to its extensive catchment area, which includes Manitoba, Northwestern Ontario, and Nunavut.

“Being able to conduct biopsies and staging tests—all in one appointment—makes the diagnostic process smoother and improves patient outcomes,” she explains. This efficiency is especially beneficial for patients who travel long distances, often incurring significant travel costs for treatment. **It makes a tremendous difference for patients to complete everything in one day rather than making multiple trips. It allows us to provide patient care in a very seamless fashion and creates an environment where we know we’re providing good care.**”

She adds that the new clinic has also improved the unit’s ability to collaborate with other units at HSC, describing a recent case where her team worked together to address an elderly patient with a severe tear in the esophagus—a condition with high risks. Dr. Akhtar-Danesh says the patient was efficiently moved through diagnosis, a CT scan, and surgery within hours of the patient’s initial assessment.

“Despite the challenging diagnosis and the patient’s advanced age, he responded well to treatment and was discharged a week later. This outcome highlights the effectiveness of our integrated approach, and the dedication of every team member involved in his care.”

As Dr. Akhtar-Danesh continues her work in this unique setting, her dedication to improving patient outcomes exemplifies the positive changes that HSC Foundation donor-funded initiatives can bring to the health care landscape in Manitoba.

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To support crucial updates at the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit, please consider making a gift to support the Advancing Thoracic Surgical Care Fund at [hscfoundation.mb.ca/donate](https://hscfoundation.mb.ca/donate), or call the HSC Foundation office at 204-515-5612 or 1-800-679-8493 (toll-free).