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Patricio Robayo | Democrat

A look inside The Center for Discovery's Children's Specialty Hospital



A nurses' station at The Center for Discovery's Children's Specialty Hospital is an example of attention to playful detail.

A groundbreaking new hospital is transforming care for children with complex developmental disabilities. The Center for Discovery's Children's Specialty Hospital, now open in Rock Hill, is the first of its kind, offering short-term inpatient care designed to stabilize and support children with autism and other medical complexities.

On a recent tour of the facility, the Democrat saw firsthand how the hospital is already making an impact. Dr. Theresa Hamlin, President and CEO of The Center for Discovery (TCFD), guided the visit, explaining the extensive work that went into renovating the former Frontier building into a state-of-the-art medical facility.

"It was a long process," she said. "There was a lot that needed to happen in terms of just the overall building mechanics itself in order to manage a new build."





The new specialty hospital is a place where technology, medicine and creativity meet in an effort to give patients and their families a helping hand up.

The hospital has 18 beds, with 12 dedicated to children with severe autism who also have significant medical needs. These children often struggle with aggressive behaviors or self-harm due to underlying health issues. The goal of the hospital, Dr. Hamlin explained, is to determine the root causes of these behaviors and provide treatment that will allow children to return home and re-enter their school communities.

The remaining six beds are reserved for medically fragile children who require intensive care, including those recovering from surgeries or managing chronic conditions such as respiratory difficulties.

“These 18 beds should continue to turn over every three, four, or five months,” Dr. Hamlin noted. “That way, we’re serving a much broader population across New York State.”

Governor Kathy Hochul highlighted the hospital’s importance in addressing gaps in care.

“New York State is devoted to improving health outcomes for all children, particularly those with developmental disabilities whose families face challenges in accessing suitable medical care,” she said in a statement. Senator Charles Schumer also praised the initiative, saying it would be “a beacon of hope in Sullivan County for generations to come.”

During the tour, the Democrat observed classrooms with young students engaged in activities designed to prepare them for traditional school settings. These children, some from Sullivan County, are part of an early intervention program aimed at developing essential skills like communication, self-care, and social interaction.

“We are committed to really giving them those skills so they can sit at their desk, go to the bathroom by themselves, eat lunch by themselves, and ultimately return to public school,” Dr. Hamlin said.



One of the most remarkable aspects of the hospital is its holistic approach to care. The facility includes sensory rooms, a therapeutic gym, and a training kitchen where families learn how to prepare nutritious meals for their children.

“We know that food impacts not only an individual’s health but also their behaviors,” Dr. Hamlin explained. “Kids’ behaviors improve when they feel better.”

The tour also showcased the hospital’s commitment to creating a stress-free environment. Every detail, from the calming color schemes to the sound-absorbing ceiling panels, is designed to reduce anxiety and promote healing. Large windows provide stunning views of nature, reinforcing the center’s belief in the therapeutic power of the outdoors.

Everything in the building has been carefully designed with purpose — from the calming colors to the layout of the rooms — to create a space that serves the children’s needs effectively.

The hospital is bright and open, with sunlight streaming through large windows that offer sweeping views of the Catskill Mountains.

This hospital is not just a medical facility—it’s a refuge for families who may have nowhere else to turn.



New hospital transforms care for children with complex disabilities. The Center for Discovery’s Children’s Specialty Hospital in Rock Hill offers short-term inpatient care for autism and medical complexities.





Danielle Brasington, left, and Dr. Theresa Hamlin of The Center for Discovery with a young student who, after weeks of care, spoke for the first time, astonishing his parents.

Miracles already happening

Dr. Hamlin shared a powerful story of a young boy who arrived at the hospital who had reduced verbal communication. Within just a few weeks, his parents were amazed to hear him speaking more frequently and with increased volume. “His parents came this weekend and were absolutely amazed,” Dr. Hamlin said. The environment here fosters growth and healing, with staff who are deeply passionate about their work, according to Dr. Hamlin.

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“The focus is to bring these children in at a young age, provide them with the skills they need, and help them transition back to a less restrictive environment where they can thrive,” said Danielle Brasington, Assistant Chief of Education.

“Many of these children have not had access to early intervention services due to various challenges, and we are seeing remarkable progress in a short period of time.”

Brasington said that the school program at the hospital is not just about academics but about helping children develop life skills that will allow them to integrate more successfully into society.

“We take a whole-body approach, ensuring that each child receives individualized support in a nurturing environment,” she added. “The collaboration between teachers, therapists, and medical professionals ensures that each student receives the comprehensive care they need to flourish.”



Since opening in December, the hospital has already started receiving patients, and the demand for services is growing.

“We’re starting to get a waiting list already,” Dr. Hamlin said. “The need is so great right now for these children.”

Looking ahead, TCFD has plans to expand. Recent legislation will allow the organization to develop the hospital’s second floor, creating a 40-bed unit for adults with severe medical and developmental needs.

“Right now, individuals with complex disabilities often end up in hospitals for extended stays, or they are discharged to nursing homes where they may not get the specialized care they need,” Dr. Hamlin explained. “We want to change that.”

The Center for Discovery is proving that children with disabilities deserve more than just treatment — they deserve a chance to live their fullest lives.



Dr. Theresa Hamlin, TCFD President & CEO, champions a fuller life for children with disabilities beyond just treatment.

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