

# THRIVE



## A Decade of Care, A Lifetime of Impact

***Encompass Health Rehabilitation  
Hospital of Newnan Celebrates  
10 years in Coweta***

***Forward Momentum with  
2nd Annual Summit***

***Pickleball Fever***

***Investing in Coweta: From  
Roads to Recreation***





# Encompass Health:

## A Hidden Gem Providing Unique Care in Newnan

by W. Winston Skinner

Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Newnan is celebrating its 10th anniversary, yet many residents remain unfamiliar with the unique services it provides. Located just a block from Piedmont Newnan Hospital, Encompass Health has partnered with Piedmont since 2021, but it serves a distinct purpose in the community—not as a nursing home, as some might assume, but as a rehabilitation hospital.

“There are a lot of people who drive by us every day and have no idea what we provide for our patients and our community,” says Kent Buchanan, director of therapy operations. “Until you walk through our doors, you don’t actually understand it,” adds Amber Hester, area CEO for Encompass Health.

Specializing in rehabilitation, Encompass Health helps patients overcome significant medical challenges, often after a stroke, to regain vital life skills and independence. “When you focus on one thing, you get to do it really well,” says Brandy Cortes, business development director. “We should be better at it than anyone else, because that’s all we do,” Buchanan echoes.

As Coweta County’s only inpatient rehabilitation hospital, Encompass Health is a place of transformation for many patients and their families. Patients often arrive needing assistance with basic life skills but leave with renewed independence. The staff is deeply committed to helping each patient make substantial progress. “For those of us who’ve been here since we opened, it’s an opportunity to give back to our community and invest in our neighbors,” says Buchanan.

Patients come to Encompass Health facing life-altering injuries or illnesses. The team meets with potential patients at various locations—hospitals, doctor’s offices, or even at home. A doctor’s referral isn’t required; individuals can reach out to Encompass Health directly to begin the evaluation and insurance coordination process.

The average age of an Encompass Health patient is 71.5 years, with stroke survivors comprising the largest group at 21 percent. Other conditions include spinal cord injuries, brain inflammation, Parkinson’s, multiple sclerosis, and tumors. Encompass treats around 140 patients each month—approximately 1,600 annually—with a total of 13,400 patients served since opening.

Patients are admitted to Encompass Health Newnan with the goal of being able to return home. An interdisciplinary team, led by the attending physician, determines when a patient is ready for discharge. Most patients—82.4 percent—return home, while others transition to hospitals or nursing homes for continued care. Encompass Health’s discharge rate exceeds both state and national averages, thanks to its strong rehabilitation program, which also reduces readmissions to the local hospital.

Encompass Health employs 267 people in Newnan, with its largest departments being nursing (over 100 employees) and therapy (about 75 employees). The hospital’s interdisciplinary team meets weekly to review each patient’s progress. “Every patient gets an individualized plan of care,” says Buchanan, designed around their specific needs and goals.



Each patient's recovery journey varies. Some aim to move independently around their homes, while others prepare to return to work. "We want patients to get back to a community setting," says Cortes, whether that's a home, an independent living apartment, or an assisted living facility. "The patient's goals align with ours: to go home and be as independent as possible," adds Buchanan.

At Encompass Health, patients engage in daily activities designed to restore independence. In the gym, patients work one-on-one with therapists, sometimes joining group sessions to strengthen specific skills. In the Activities of Daily Living suite, they practice everyday tasks in a setting that resembles a typical home, from cooking to laundry. Encompass Health also offers in-house dialysis, pharmacy services, and lab and X-ray services on call.

The facility is filled with amenities to help patients feel comfortable and inspired, including large photographs of Georgia scenes on the walls. Patients practice skills like walking on uneven surfaces, navigating stairs, gardening, and filling bird feeders in outdoor spaces designed for real-world challenges.

Encompass Health uses every moment for education. "They use every single minute with the patients to provide care or educate them," says Cortes. Families are encouraged to join sessions and attend family conferences, learning practical skills like transferring patients from wheelchairs. "Family involvement is another way we set ourselves apart," Buchanan notes.

Encompass Health's commitment to patient-

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centered care helps patients reach a "new normal," empowering them to function independently at home. The hospital continues to look forward, with plans for an expansion and ongoing adoption of cutting-edge technologies, including robotics and artificial intelligence. "We have a reputation for being cutting edge in technology," says Buchanan, with tools like robotic arms and augmented reality on the horizon to support patients' recovery.

Part of a regional network, Encompass Health Newnan joins locations in Atlanta, Henry County, and Cumming, with new hospitals set to open in Athens and the Snellville/Loganville area. Encompass Health locations also serve Augusta and Savannah, providing accessible rehabilitation services across Georgia.

## Encompass Health Patient: 'They Are Really Good Folks'



William James Davis, known to all as Billy, moved himself down the hallway at Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Newnan, greeting every staff member and patient he passed with a smile and a warm, "Hey, man, how're you doing?"

Davis, 53, a delivery driver for Expedited Freight, first came to Encompass Health after a medical crisis. Feeling unwell, he had gone to the ER, where doctors discovered he had sepsis—a severe infection—as well as kidney issues and tachycardia. After a long hospital stay, he arrived at Encompass for rehabilitation.

"When he arrived, he needed a machine to lift him from the bed into a custom chair," said Kent Buchanan, director of therapy operations. "He relied on others for all his daily activities, including mobility."

"When I first got here, I was flat on my back," Davis recalled. "I couldn't move. It took four people to get me up."

At 550 pounds, Davis hadn't prioritized his health in years, but he came to Encompass Health determined to make a change. "I promised myself I'd have a good attitude, do my best, and not complain," he said.

Davis quickly grew close to the team helping him reclaim his independence. "They are really good folks," he said. "There are so many good people. It's incredible."

In the close-knit environment at Encompass Health, where every staff member contributes

to patient recovery, Davis became a source of encouragement himself. At lunch, he sat where he could greet everyone passing by. "I like to say hello to people," he said, describing himself as "very open" and always eager to lift others' spirits.

Davis's daily workouts in the gym became central to his progress. He praised the physical therapists as "just incredible" and embraced the facility's motto: "No pain, no gain."



Celebrating 10 years of care: Encompass staff who have been with the hospital since day one come together for a commemorative photo.



# Healthcare Jobs Are Good Medicine for Local Economy

by W. Winston Skinner

Coweta County boasts a strong presence in the healthcare industry, which is a substantial boost for the local and regional economy. In 2022, 23,261 healthcare workers were employed across Coweta, Carroll, Douglas, Haralson, Paulding, and Polk counties, according to the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of West Georgia (UWG) in Carrollton. Of those, 6,810 healthcare jobs were in Coweta County, with an average weekly pay of \$1,264, as reported by Dr. W. Joey Smith, chair of economics at UWG.

Healthcare jobs have a positive impact on a region's economy, notes Dr. N. Adam Brown, an emergency physician, entrepreneur, and healthcare executive who founded ABIG Health, a healthcare growth strategy firm, in 2022. "Healthcare is the glue that holds a community together," Brown said. "Community hospitals and critical access facilities significantly impact the regions they serve."

Coweta County's healthcare sector has long included doctors' offices, hospitals, and nursing homes. Recent years have seen even greater growth, with the addition of City of Hope, part of a national cancer hospital chain; Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Newnan; numerous specialty medical offices; and a growing network of senior housing and care facilities.

However, healthcare's economic impact depends on job stability, Brown cautioned. "When hospitals close, wages drop, residents move away, the tax base declines, and social services suffer," he explained. Though relying on a single industry isn't ideal, Brown emphasized the advantages of a strong healthcare base: "The benefits far outweigh the risks of losing these jobs."

Increased healthcare wages can affect local costs for goods and services, such as dining and entertainment, as residents have higher disposable incomes. But a strong healthcare industry also attracts new businesses, industries, and families to the area, providing a foundation for broader economic growth. "It's a foundational industry for other types of industrial growth," Smith noted.

Healthcare's presence makes communities more appealing, even if people don't always think of including it as a priority when

relocating. "People want to be reasonably close to a hospital," Smith said, and communities with quality healthcare often experience growth. Access to healthcare not only improves public health but encourages healthy habits. "Hospitals lead initiatives like blood drives, fundraisers, and educational programs," Brown explained. "Proximity to care also makes people more likely to seek medical help when they need it, improving overall health."

In addition to providing high-paying jobs, the healthcare sector has a multiplier effect on the local economy, as healthcare employees spend their income locally. Much of a hospital's revenue circulates back into the community through salaries and payments to vendors and suppliers. New facilities, expansions, and renovations provide work for local builders and contractors, adding further economic value.

To attract and retain healthcare jobs, Smith suggested local governments foster a senior-friendly environment, noting that seniors' retirement income is "more portable than any other kind." Property tax exemptions for seniors and the state's exemption of groceries from the 4% sales tax make Coweta County an attractive destination for retirees, especially from northern states. "People want not only a nice lifestyle but also healthcare to support it," Smith said.

Healthcare as an industry has been growing in west Georgia, Smith noted, with job numbers rebounding after a temporary dip during the COVID-19 pandemic. The region's healthcare workforce grew from 21,667 in 2019 to 24,305 by the end of 2023. "That's a significant increase," Smith said, with annual growth at a steady 2.7% since 2020, a rate that has more than doubled since 2000 and is outpacing population growth.

Looking forward, the area's senior living options are expected to expand, with more assisted living and memory care facilities on the horizon. As the senior population grows and demand for healthcare rises, Coweta County's healthcare industry appears set to thrive. "We're not going to see a reduction in healthcare in our area," Smith said, underscoring the industry's lasting value to the community.

## Free Stroke Support Group Offered at Encompass

Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital hosts a free monthly stroke support group, open to all stroke survivors, caregivers, family members, and friends. The group meets on the last Tuesday of each month from 2-3 p.m. at the Hospital Café, located at 2101 East Newnan Crossing Blvd.

Brandy S. Cortes, RN, business development director at Encompass, describes the group as "a fun and welcoming place to connect with others, offering education, encouragement, hope, and understanding."

Participation is open to anyone affected by stroke; prior affiliation with Encompass is not required. Each session includes light refreshments, with various topics and activities designed to support attendees.

For more information, please call 678-552-6200 or email [Brittany.Hill@encompasshealth.com](mailto:Brittany.Hill@encompasshealth.com).