

A Global Breakthrough: Advancing the Future of Cancer Care

A national study conducted throughout Israel may bring new treatment options to people living with Hodgkin lymphoma, one of the most treatable blood cancers, but still a life-changing diagnosis for many young adults. The large-scale program, conducted across 15 medical centers, and recently presented at a leading international hematology conference, examined an innovative treatment approach combining chemotherapy with a targeted biologic.

The study, co-led by **Dr. Zvi Forgas**, senior hematologist at Soroka, has achieved remarkable results. **The outcome showed extremely high response rates, with the vast majority of people achieving complete remission and overall survival reaching 100 percent during the follow-up period.** In addition to its effectiveness, the new protocol significantly reduced the need for radiation therapy, helping people avoid long-term side effects while maintaining excellent outcomes.

This achievement reflects Soroka's commitment to advancing cancer care in the Negev while playing a leading role in research that is shaping the future of treatment world-wide.

From the Negev to the World: Developing Lifesaving Cures

Professor Shlomi Codish, Director General of Soroka Medical Center at the **IAC National Summit**, joining a fireside chat on Innovative Medicine for the Future in the Negev and Galil Regions. Alongside **Professor Edo Y. Birati**, **Dr. Zeev Feldman** of Tzafon Medical Center, and **Professor Nachman Ash**, former Director-General of the Israel's Ministry of Health, discussed breakthroughs in oncology, ophthalmology, and emergency medicine. As the sole level-1 trauma center serving over 1.2 million people in southern Israel, Soroka is a leader in clinical innovation, research, and advanced care. By bridging global expertise with local impact, the hospital ensures that life-saving treatments and medical advances reach patients across the Negev, from routine care to complex, cutting-edge procedures.



A New Frontier: Bringing CAR-T Therapy Beyond Cancer

Soroka recently reached a deeply meaningful milestone with the launch of a novel CAR-T research study for people living with lupus, offering new hope to those facing one of the most complex autoimmune diseases. CAR-T, which has been used for several years to treat people with cancer at the Legacy Heritage Oncology Center and the Dr. Larry Norton Institute, is now being implemented, among the first study sites in Israel, in the fields of immunology and rheumatology, opening the door to possibilities that until recently felt out of reach.

CAR-T works by collecting a person's own T-cells, modifying them in a laboratory, and returning them to the body so they can target harmful immune cells. For people with severe lupus, whose daily lives can be shaped by pain, fatigue, and uncertainty, this research offers the hope of not just managing symptoms, but truly changing the course of the illness.

The study is led by **Dr. Uri Greenbaum**, head of Cell Therapy in the Division of Hematology, in collaboration with **Dr. Muhammed Abu Sbeit**, senior rheumatologist, and **Sima Naftulovich**, transplant coordinator nurse at the hematology center. We would also like to thank the dedicated team members at the Clinical Research Center: **Alina Yusupov**, **Noa Abraham**, and **Meshi Ivgi-Bar**, whose work helps bring innovative care to people in the Negev.



Alina Yusupov, Meshi Ivgi-Bar, Sima Naftulovich, Dr. Uri Greenbaum & Dr. Muhammed Abu Sbeit

"This is a significant milestone for people and medicine in the Negev, CAR-T may help us create a new therapeutic horizon for people with advanced lupus. We are proud to offer groundbreaking studies to people in southern Israel."

— Dr. Greenbaum.



American Friends of Soroka Medical Center
P.O. Box 184-H Scarsdale, NY 10583

Inside: On the Front Lines of Lifesaving Care Under Fire

SPRING SOROKA NEWSLETTER



Building for the Future: Soroka's Expanding Facilities

Soroka Medical Center continues to grow, ensuring the people of the Negev receive world-class care at every stage of life. By August 2026, the hospital will open its new Rehabilitation Center, featuring the first dedicated pediatric rehab floor in the Negev with hydrotherapy and 10 specialized beds. The Neonatal Care Center and Pediatric Surgical Procedure Unit, a first for the region, will also open, providing advanced care designed for the most vulnerable patients.



Looking ahead to 2027, Soroka's Emergency Department and ICU will expand to increase critical care capacity, alongside the fortification of northern operating rooms and the addition of three protected ORs to ensure uninterrupted surgical care during emergencies.

Soroka's commitment to revolutionizing rehabilitation medicine, addressing the urgent need for specialized services, and ensuring that patients, from infants to adults, receive timely, safe, and comprehensive care. With advanced facilities and skilled teams, Soroka continues to set the standard for healthcare in southern Israel.

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SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER



From Recovery to Renewal: Hope Springs in the Negev

From Generation to Generation: Carrying Hope Forward



During the recent Passover season, we reflected on the enduring story at the heart of the holiday; a journey from hardship to hope, from uncertainty to renewal. For generations, the story of the Exodus has reminded the Jewish people that even in the most difficult moments, resilience and courage can guide us forward. It is a story about perseverance, community, and the belief that brighter days are always possible.

Across Israel, and particularly in the Negev, communities continue to face extraordinary challenges while holding fast to the values that have sustained us for generations. Physicians, nurses, and staff continue their work with unwavering dedication, caring for patients, supporting families, and ensuring that lifesaving treatments never stop, even under the most difficult circumstances.

In the Passover story, preparation and vigilance played a vital role. Today, Soroka embodies that same commitment. As the only level-1 trauma center serving more than 1.2 million people in southern Israel, Soroka, the Iron Dome of medicine, must always be ready to respond to emergencies, ready to care for the most critically ill, and ready to welcome new life into the world. Even during times of crisis, Soroka's teams continue to deliver compassionate care while maintaining the highest standards of medical excellence.



At the same time, the story of Soroka is not only about the dedication of its medical teams. It is also a story of partnership. The strength, preparedness, and resilience of this remarkable hospital are made possible by a global community of supporters who believe deeply in its mission. Your contributions ensure that Soroka's doctors and nurses have the advanced technology (and training), protected facilities, and critical resources needed before emergencies happen.

Passover reminds us that freedom is not simply a moment in history, it's a responsibility we carry forward together. Each generation is called to strengthen and protect the communities we cherish, to care for those in need, and to help build a future defined by hope and healing. Together, we can continue to support the healing, resilience and hope that defines Soroka and the people we serve.

B'Shalom,


Carlos M. Gutierrez
Board President


Rachel Heisler Sheinfeld
Executive Director

Resilience in Action: Soroka Stands Tall During Operation Roaring Lion

As Operation Roaring Lion continues, the hospital has transitioned into full emergency mode to ensure lifesaving care never stops, even under fire.



Following a major missile strike in the city of Be'er Sheva on March 2, Soroka declared a mass casualty event (MCE level 1). In a rapid mobilization of surgical and trauma teams, over 100 injured people

were evacuated to our emergency department. While most were treated for lacerations and symptoms of anxiety, the hospital has now treated nearly 160 people since the start of the operation. This mission is carried out despite staffing challenges, as many physicians have been called to military reserve duty.

On March 21, Soroka handled 2 separate mass casualty events, following missile attacks on Dimona and Arad, with hundreds of wounded including many children. The pace has been relentless, and Soroka is rising to the occasion seamlessly, as a true bastion of hope and healing.



Even during active conflict, life continues to flourish. Dozens of babies have been born safely each day. Mothers have arrived at the Saban Birth and Maternity Center during rocket alerts, with medical teams performing emergency deliveries inside fully protected operating suites while sirens sound outside.



To be continued

Save the Date

Soroka Friends Shabbat Dinner at Hampton Synagogue: **July 10th**
14th Annual Gala at the NY Plaza: **November 17th**
For a complete event schedule, visit [Soroka.org](https://www.soroka.org)



Heroes of Truth: From the Frontlines of Care to the Frontlines of Truth

In times of crisis, truth and courage matter more than ever. That belief inspired *Heroes of Truth*, a photography initiative by **Limor Garfinkle**, launched by American Friends of Soroka Medical Center at last year's Hope, Healing and Heroism Gala. In the wake of October 7th and rising global antisemitism, the project honors individuals who stand courageously for Israel.



Nili Margalit



Dr. Vadim Benkovich



Dr. Yarden Zohar

This winter, Limor traveled to Soroka to capture the hospital's heroes, doctors, nurses, and staff who have stood unwavering through repeated crises, from the horrors of October 7 to the recent devastating ballistic missile attack, working tirelessly in emergency rooms, operating suites, and intensive care units to serve as the frontline of healthcare for over one million residents across the Negev.

The initiative extends to public voices and advocates who stand proudly for truth, including author and activist **Noa Tishby**, comedian **Modi Rosenfeld**, former Israeli government spokesperson **Eylon Levy**, writer and activist **Einat Wilf**, comedian **Elon Gold**, Jewish civil rights advocate **Adela Cojab**, fashion entrepreneur **Julia Haart**, creative director **Yoav Davis**, and U.S. Congressman **Ritchie Torres**, among many others.

As the project continues to grow, *Heroes of Truth* is reaching communities across the country. One of the most recent gatherings, held in New York in partnership with **Bank Hapoalim**, featured **Adela Cojab**, a Mexican-born, Syrian-Lebanese Jewish author and legal advocate known for filing a Title VI complaint against NYU over campus antisemitism, with the goal of strengthening protections for Jewish students nationwide.

At its core, this endeavor is about far more than portraits: it honors courage, amplifies truth, and transforms art into action, supporting Soroka's mental health programs and ensuring that those carrying the invisible wounds of trauma receive the care they need.



Eylon Levy



Noa Tishby



Julia Haart



Darren Glick, Limor Garfinkle, Caroline Freidfertig, Deborah Koenigsberger Gutierrez, Sami Steigmann, Carlos M. Gutierrez, Adela Cojab, Rachel Heisler & Samantha Franklin

Grounded in Science: Advancing Maternal and Child Health

A major new Israeli study involving researchers from Soroka is helping to address one of the most persistent concerns around maternal health and vaccines.

The large-scale study conducted in collaboration with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Clalit Health Services, and the Azrieli National Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment Research, examined medical records from more than 150,000 births in Israel between 2016 and 2020. The goal was to determine whether receiving a flu vaccine during pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of autism in children.

“There is no connection between giving a flu vaccine to a woman during pregnancy and autism in the newborn. This is a very important conclusion, especially during the winter, with everything going on around influenza and concerns about vaccines.” According to Meiri, these concerns are well known from clinical practice. “As physicians, both neurologists and child psychiatrists, we constantly deal with questions from parents who worry about their child’s health and development.”

— Professor Gal Meiri, M.D.



Professor Gal Meiri

After analyzing years of follow-up data and adjusting for factors such as maternal age, ethnicity, place of residence, and healthcare access, researchers found no connection between receiving the flu vaccine during pregnancy and autism spectrum disorders in children. The findings were consistent regardless of the trimester in which the vaccine was administered.

Influenza infection during pregnancy, particularly when accompanied by fever, can pose risks to both the mother and fetus. Vaccination remains one of the safest and most effective ways to protect maternal and fetal health.

By contributing to one of the world's largest studies on this topic, Soroka researchers lead in advancing evidence-based medicine and helping families to make informed decisions grounded in science.

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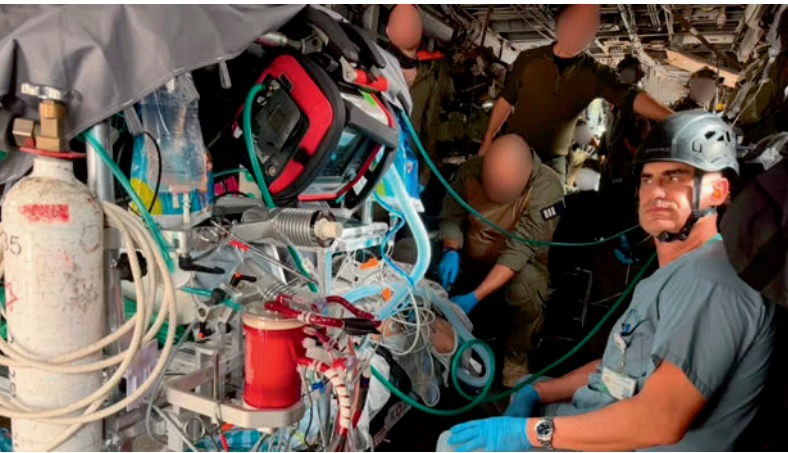
Lifesaving in Flight: A Historic ECMO Rescue Mission

Soroka, together with the Israeli Air Force and Joseftal Hospital, made history in mid-February by completing the first-ever helicopter evacuation of a critically ill patient on extracorporeal membrane oxygen (ECMO), a life-support system that acts as an artificial heart and lungs.

When a young person arrived at Joseftal Hospital in Eilat in severe respiratory distress, Soroka's intensive care unit team sprang into action. Recognizing that only ECMO could stabilize the fragile condition, Soroka specialists traveled to Eilat to connect the patient to the machine, an incredibly complex procedure even in a hospital.

With coordination and courage, the Israeli Air Force helicopter transported the patient, still reliant on ECMO, to Soroka, shortening what could have been a perilous ground transfer into a lifesaving flight. “Patients connected to an ECMO machine are in a condition in which their lungs do not function at all, and their lives depend on the device,” said **Dr. Ori Galante**, Director of Soroka's Internal Intensive Care Unit and head of the ECMO program. This mission showcases the power of teamwork between military and medical

teams and Soroka's unwavering commitment to pushing the boundaries of critical care. Special thanks to **Dr. Lior Fuchs**, **Ina Itin**, medical ICU nurse and ECMO program coordinator, **Eli Raini**, ECMO technologist, and the staff and team at Joseftal Hospital.



Dr. Ori Galante en route to lifesaving mission

A Community United: Standing with Soroka in Times of Need

Soroka Friends gathered at the **Chabad Israel Center in Boca Raton** for an inspiring evening honoring the staff, medics, and volunteer physicians whose dedication saves lives every day.

Dr. Ran Abuhasira, Head of Clinical Research at Soroka and a fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital, recounted the tense moments after the Iranian missile strike on June 19, 2025, when the clinical research unit was devastated. Amid the chaos, he and his team rescued critical biodata samples, preserving years of research that could have been lost. Soroka's work extends beyond emergency care, safeguarding knowledge that can save countless lives worldwide.

That same courage was reflected in Soroka's ophthalmology team. **Dr. Larry Halperin**, retina surgeon and longtime volunteer, has performed complex surgeries and supported the hospital's specialized unit. “I have done thousands of retina surgeries, but operating on a 20-year-old soldier fighting for his country was unlike anything else,” he said. “The biggest impact is simply showing up. When you're there, they know they are not alone.” The team's volunteers bring skill and reassurance, ensuring patients receive world-class care even under the most challenging circumstances.

The evening concluded with a deeply personal perspective from **Judy Kleinman**, whose children, medics and medical students, were on Soroka's campus during the attack. She recounted their courage, quick thinking, and expertise, offering a window into the extraordinary spirit of Soroka's staff and the community they serve.

From rescuing vital research to performing life-saving surgeries, and witnessing courage under fire, the evening brought Soroka's humanitarian mission to life.



Dr. Larry Halperin

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Help us meet
the \$1 million
Challenge
Grant.

Every dollar you give will be matched, up to \$1 million, to support the rebuilding of Soroka's campus. This extraordinary opportunity is made possible by a generous donor who hopes their gift will inspire others to give.

Resilience in Action: Soroka Stands Tall During Operation Roaring Lion (Continued)

For the first time in Israel, Soroka has launched its own **independent cellular network**, ensuring uninterrupted medical operations even in the event of nationwide infrastructure collapse or cyberattacks. Built in partnership with Pelephone, the private network provides hundreds of emergency staff with secure, congestion-free communication, enabling instant emergency alerts, continuous coordination, and real-time transmission of critical medical data.

To preserve critical capacity in protected underground wards, Soroka has expanded its **hospital-at-home program**. This initiative allows eligible people to receive comprehensive, hospitalization-level care, including daily physician visits, medicines, and diagnostic testing, from the safety of their own homes. Since the operation began, more than 50 people have already been treated through this expanding community-based program.

The resilience of our staff has drawn national attention. **President Isaac Herzog and First Lady Michal Herzog** recently toured our protected departments and daycare facilities, which were established so that our medical teams don't have to choose between work and family. The president praised our staff's professionalism, calling Soroka **“among the best in the world.”**

For the people of the Negev, Soroka is where life begins and healing happens.



Soroka's hospital-at-home program in action



President Isaac Herzog and First Lady Michal Herzog, Professor Shlomi Codish & the Soroka Team