



**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**  
Newark, New Jersey

**\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL RECOGNIZES 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL N.J. MATERNAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY WITH FIRST LADY TAMMY MURPHY AND HEALTH COMMISSIONER JUDITH PERSICHILLI**

**Newark, New Jersey** – On Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, University Hospital was honored to host First Lady Tammy Murphy and New Jersey Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli, for N.J.’s Maternal Health Awareness Day. They were joined by a group of University Hospital physicians from the Obstetrics, Gynecology & Women’s health department for a conversation on Maternal Health. Their discussions covered a broad spectrum of issues, including State initiatives, communication with patients, the impact of the opioid epidemic, and recent trends.

“Our goal is to make New Jersey the safest place in the nation to give birth,” said **First Lady Tammy Murphy**. “In order to achieve that goal, we must collaborate with our community, state, and federal partners to develop strategies that will improve health outcomes for New Jersey’s women and families. Through Nurture NJ, we are cultivating these relationships and are committed to providing support for mothers and babies across a range of economic and social factors, reducing infant and maternal mortality and morbidity rates, and eliminating the racial disparities and implicit bias in our health care systems.”

“Hospital clinicians are on the front lines and have the power to address the maternal health crisis in our state,” said **New Jersey Health Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli**. “The Department values their partnership as we implement efforts to eliminate inequities in care and improve outcomes.”

N.J.’s Maternal Health Awareness Day represents a call to action to raise public awareness about maternal health and to promote maternal safety. The date was first recognized by a proclamation issued by Governor Murphy in 2018, in acknowledgment of New Jersey’s maternal health crisis. New Jersey ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation for maternal mortality rates. Thirty-seven women die, on

average, for every 100,000 live births in New Jersey, compared to an average of 20 nationally. For women of color, the statistics are even worse. New Jersey's African American women are five times more likely to die due to pregnancy complications than Caucasian women. Similarly, African American babies are three times more likely to die in their first year of life.

“We are pleased to see N.J.’s Third Annual Maternal Health Awareness Day continue to grow and garner attention every year,” said **Dr. Joseph Apuzzio, Chief of Maternal Fetal Medicine at University Hospital** and one of the chief advocates for the creation of N.J.’s Annual Maternal Health Awareness Day. “Only with the recognition and awareness of maternal health issues by all stakeholders including providers of obstetrical services, hospitals, our legislators, insurance payers, and patients and their families can improvements occur to decrease maternal morbidity, mortality, and disparities.”

“I want to thank First Lady Murphy and Commissioner Persichilli for choosing University Hospital as the place to discuss the state of maternal care in New Jersey,” said **Dr. Shereef Elnahal, President & CEO of University Hospital**. “We are proud of our progress in maternal health outcomes here at the hospital, but we are well aware that we must continue to do more—especially in reducing disparities for Black mothers and babies. Every mother deserves the opportunity for a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.”

This visit continues the recent highlights of University Hospital’s outstanding Maternal Health practices, following a visit earlier this month by the United States Surgeon General, and the recent announcement of the hospital’s highly successful Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Treatment & Observation Protocols (N.A.S.T.O.P.) program.

With over 40 clinic physicians and labor & delivery registered nurses, 1,600+ annual deliveries, and more than 24,000 prenatal patient visits per year, University Hospital’s Regional Perinatal Center handles the most complicated pregnancies and most medically fragile newborns. Services include counseling for women with chronic health conditions, evaluation and prevention of pre-term births and infant deaths, and care for women with significant medical problems, such as HIV, diabetes, fetal complications or substance addictions. Within New Jersey, University Hospital ranks among the lowest C-section rates of all hospitals, the most successful vaginal birth after C-section (VBAC) rates, and the lowest episiotomy rates.

University Hospital was the first, and only hospital in Essex County to be designated as a Baby-Friendly Hospital by Baby-Friendly USA, as part of a global program by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, to encourage mothers to nourish their newborns with breastmilk.

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### **About University Hospital**

University Hospital is part of one of the nation's leading academic medical centers and is the Level 1 Trauma Center for Northern New Jersey. Located at University Heights in Newark, University Hospital is a principal teaching hospital of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and a regional resource for advanced services across many medical specialties. For more information about University Hospital, please visit [www.uhnj.org](http://www.uhnj.org).