



**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**  
Newark, New Jersey

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL ANNOUNCES NEW TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HITCH HEALTH**

*New service is part of the hospital's Community Health Program and will provide rides to patients in need of transportation assistance to their medical appointments*

**Newark, New Jersey** – Today, University Hospital announced a partnership with Hitch Health to provide patients with rides to and from their appointments at University Hospital, at no cost to the patient. Hitch Health has partnered with Lyft, a ride-sharing service provider. Initially, the service is available for appointments at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey at University Hospital, or at Internal Medicine or Pediatric Medicine in the Ambulatory Care Center (ACC), but further expansion is expected. Hitch Health is an innovative software product that integrates Electronic Health Records (EHR) and appointment systems with ride services such as Lyft to remove transportation barriers for patients and reduce no show-rates for hospital appointments. The partnership with Hitch Health is part of the hospital's recently launched Community Health Program, which is focused on improving access to primary and preventative care services.

Each year across the country, 3.6 million individuals do not access needed medical care because of transportation barriers, with these barriers causing patients to miss appointments at rates reaching as high as 30%.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, of the patients who have been engaged to date as part of the hospital's Familiar Faces program, an initiative led by community health chaplains to engage high utilizers of emergency services and coordinate health, social, and behavioral health services, an overwhelming majority have been identified as in need of transportation to access health care services. As a result, the Familiar Faces team will work with the Newark community to provide "on demand" service in which rides are coordinated for patients as needed.

"Our partnership with Hitch Health is one important step that the hospital is taking to remove structural barriers that prevent Newark residents from accessing high-quality health care," said **Dr.**

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.aha.org/aharet-guides/2017-11-15-social-determinants-health-series-transportation-and-role-hospitals>

**Shereef Elnahal, President and CEO of University Hospital.** “We know that our patients’ health outcomes can hinge on whether they’re able to get a safe ride to and from their appointments. That’s because transportation can often be the difference between seeing a doctor and going without much needed services—only to find folks at the doorsteps of our emergency room down the road. Our community needs more safe and reliable transportation options—and we’re privileged to provide that to many of them at no cost.”

Hitch Health will partner with Lyft to provide patients with rides to and from the hospital that are coordinated through HIPAA-compliant SMS texts, so patients do not need to have a smart phone or the Lyft application to coordinate rides. Hitch Health automatically sends eligible patients information via text, and patients are able to reply back if they are in need of transportation. After a patient accepts a ride, Hitch Health will dispatch the ride on the day of the appointment. Following their appointment, patients have the option to text “ready” to the same number when they are ready to go home, and a ride will be immediately dispatched to pick them up from the ACC.

“Too often in urban, rural and many communities that face transit-oriented barriers, residents may have complications in urgent travel to the hospitals or clinics,” said **Ras J. Baraka, Mayor of the City of Newark.** “The partnership of Hitch Health, Lyft and University Hospital looks to solve this problem in a highly innovative way by using cutting edge technology. Through this unique partnership they have developed a model that could be critically important to increasing access to health care to the communities that need the most support. As we are developing new and emerging technology that will strive to provide access to healthcare for all, at the same time we must also ensure that patient data is protected and secured.”

“University Hospital’s partnership with Hitch Health to provide transportation for patients receiving care at the hospital demonstrates their commitment to helping the community,” said **Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., Essex County Executive.** “This partnership with Hitch Health, which uses Lyft as a ride-sharing provider, is a great move towards overcoming the hurdles of healthcare by creating a transportation program that directly aids residents and helps them get to and from medical appointments.”

“When we’re ill, with limited resources and other concerns, transportation should not be an obstacle to the kind of on-going care that prevents crisis-type hospital visits,” said **New Jersey Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee Member Ronald L. Rice, District 28 (Essex).** “By offering this cost-effective convenience, University Hospital and Hitch Health are demonstrating their respect for the dignity and integrity of their patients and for the community as a whole. This is a shining example of providing a perfect fit between a program and the people it serves.”

“This collaboration makes it clear that the new administration is thinking innovatively and looking into all available options to increase accessibility of care for the people of Newark,” said **New Jersey Senator M. Teresa Ruiz, District 29 (Essex).** “Transportation, or lack thereof, can be a major barrier to care, preventing people from going to routine appointments or receiving emergency medical attention. Connecting patients to their doctors in a timely manner is a critical piece of improving public health. This partnership is a welcome reminder that new technology

presents new opportunities to serve the public good and improve the lives of our state's most vulnerable."

Hitch Health ensures patient confidentiality as Lyft drivers will not be able to distinguish a ride arranged by Hitch Health or a ride scheduled through the publicly available application. Patients also have access to the multilingual Hitch Call Center at 1-855-744-0014 for assistance with the service.

"The Familiar Faces program creates a bridge between the hospital and the Newark community so that we can help alleviate the concerns of our patients, and we consistently hear that transportation is a missing link to ensuring access to critical health care services," said **Angela Brooks-Wright, Community Healthcare Chaplain at University Hospital.**

University Hospital's Community Health Program seeks to improve health outcomes for Newark residents, lessen dependency on emergency services as a primary resource for medical attention, and improve access to primary care services. It is part of University Hospital's strategy to create a "whole person," relationship-based approach to health education and treatment in the Newark community.

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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).