

On 110th Anniversary, National Jewish Health Gives Thanks to Colorado

DECEMBER 11, 2009

DENVER — In the latter part of the 19th century, thousands of tuberculosis sufferers from around the country thought that all they had to do for a cure was come to Denver. Many spent their last dollars on a train ticket. Discriminated against and termed "lungers" once they arrived, they were banned from some rooming houses and often died on the streets. In those days, it was estimated that one third of Colorado's population had some form of lung disease.

One hundred and ten years ago today, the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives opened its doors on the corner of Colfax Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. The brainstorm of a remarkable woman named Frances Wisebart Jacobs and a young rabbi named William Friedman, the hospital was created to serve indigent people suffering from tuberculosis.

Ms. Jacobs and Mr. Friedman, the Rabbi at Temple Emanuel, enlisted the Jewish community in Denver to fund construction of the hospital. Unfortunately, the hospital was completed just as the Silver Panic of 1893 dashed Colorado's economy. The building stood empty for six years. During that time Rabbi Friedman and others persuaded B'nai B'rith, a national Jewish service organization, to fund and run the hospital.

From day one, National Jewish served patients of any creed. In fact, the very first patient was a young Christian woman named Alberta Henson, who arrived by train from Minnesota. Today, one-third of our adult and pediatric patients come from outside Colorado.

For 70 years, National Jewish never sent anyone a bill. The second oldest building on our campus still has this inscription over the door: "None may enter who can pay. None can pay who enter." As medicine became more complex, however, we began accepting insurance payments and charging patients for their treatment in 1969.

Caring for the indigent is in our DNA and we still provide substantial charity care and continue to treat all patients regardless of ability to pay. National Jewish Health also operates on campus, a free, K-8 school for 82 children with chronic illnesses who live in Denver and surrounding cities.

Our service to the community is made possible by people and institutions in Colorado and around the nation who have generously supported National Jewish Health since its inception. Loyal donors make gifts every year to National Jewish. They come to our fundraising events, bring their friends, and remember us in their wills. One dear lady just north of our campus recently left her small house as a bequest. Although our origins were in the Jewish community in Colorado, we have contributors from all faiths and walks of life.

There is a direct line from the generosity of our donors to the fact that *US News & World Report* has ranked National Jewish Health the best respiratory hospital in the nation for 12 years in a row. Their gifts enable us to provide charity care, but they help us do much more. Donors fund research programs that enable our scientists to make basic scientific discoveries and to develop new diagnostics and treatments for some of the world's most challenging diseases. Donations make it possible for our nurses and physicians to consult free of charge with patients and physicians through our Lung Line[®] and Physician Line services.

National Jewish Health is proud to reach this milestone anniversary. Through depressions and world wars and economic ups and downs, people across the nation have unwaveringly supported National Jewish. On behalf of the patients, physicians and staff at National Jewish Health, and I want to say, 'Thank you, Denver and Colorado. We look forward to serving you for another 110 years.'

Michael Salem, MD,

President and CEO

National Jewish Health

National Jewish Health is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 124 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the [media resources page](#).

Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

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