



# ThedaCare®

NEWS FROM THEDACARE®  
*For Immediate Release*  
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## THEDACARE USING REMOTE-CONTROL CARS TO HELP REDUCE PEDIATRIC ANXIETY

### *Volunteer Organization Awards Grant for Two Ride-on Cars*

APPLETON, Wis. – When a child goes in for surgery, it can be a stressful process for the young patient and difficult for the parents as well. Care teams use their compassionate skills to help calm the child before a procedure.

To ease the stress on surgery day, the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) and Surgery Team at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Appleton purchased two remote-control ride-on cars to create a fun way to transport kids to surgery and help reduce surgical anxiety.

The two cars were purchased with a \$550 grant from ThedaCare's Volunteer Services. The cars resemble sporty Jeeps, one black and one white, complete with light bars and each featuring a ThedaCare logo. The ThedaCare team also plans to add Wisconsin-themed plates.

The cars offer children a better surgical experience, reducing the anxiety and fear that can come from being separated from their parents – who can also have a better experience when their children are not upset, said Erika Rynish, RN BSN and Prep/PACU Manager at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Appleton.

“It’s completely understandable that children are scared on surgery day,” said Rynish. “We hope these cars provide an opportunity to help reduce that fear and anxiety. It will also help our care teams make the children feel more comfortable as we help get them ready for surgery.”

The surgery team recently started using the remote-control cars. They have already seen the benefit for some pediatric patients.

“Some children will still resist, and we understand that the cars cannot remove all of the fear when it comes to a surgery,” said Rynish.

Team leads Mackenzie Holtschlag and Valerie Guadagni brought the idea to Rynish, noting that one study showed a 70% reduction in the use of anti-anxiety medications before surgery when they used the remote-control cars, she said.

### **Creating a Better Patient Experience**

ThedaCare's mission is to improve the health and well-being of the communities by empowering each person to live their unique, best life. Something simple, such as the remote-control cars, allows ThedaCare to provide specific care for each person – meeting their unique needs – in this case, it is children.

While ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Appleton is not a pediatric hospital, the campus sees about 1,000 children each year who need surgeries such as ear tube replacements, dental work, minor plastic surgeries like cyst removals, urology surgeries, circumcision revisions, or occasional emergent surgeries such as appendectomies.



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“One of the things that’s hard for us is the separation between parents and the child,” Rynish said. “Some kids are fine, but most aren’t, and we understand that. They’re very upset when we’re preparing them for their procedure. For many years, we have been exploring innovative ways and resources to provide a better experience for our pediatric patients.”

The department, for example, has created its own coloring book that explains the process and what children might see. Kids also can pick out their own ChapStick, which covers the smell of the oxygen mask, and the department offers age-appropriate toys for each child.

“We feel the remote-control cars take their experience to the next level,” said Rynish. “The idea is to try to make a better experience for our kids going back to surgery and a better association with health care in general. We hope something like the cars give children the opportunity to trust care teams for their health and well-being for years to come.”

### ***Image Captions:***

To ease the stress on surgery day for children, the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) and Surgery Team at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Appleton purchased two remote-control ride-on cars to create a fun way to transport kids to surgery and help reduce surgical anxiety. The two cars were purchased with a \$550 grant from ThedaCare’s Volunteer Services. The cars resemble sporty Jeeps, one black and one white, complete with light bars and each featuring a ThedaCare logo.

### **About ThedaCare**

For nearly 115 years, ThedaCare® has been improving the health and well-being of the communities it serves in Northeast and Central Wisconsin. The organization delivers care to more than 650,000 residents in 17 counties, and employs approximately 7,000 providers and team members at 180 points of care, including eight hospitals. As an organization committed to being a leader in Population Health, team members are dedicated to empowering people to live their unique, best lives. ThedaCare is a not-for-profit health system with a level II trauma center, comprehensive cancer treatment, stroke and cardiac programs, as well as primary care. ThedaCare also partners with communities to understand needs, find solutions together, and encourage health awareness and action. In 2024, ThedaCare and Froedtert Health combined to form one system to strengthen local health care and provide high-quality services for treatment and prevention in a coordinated manner.

For more information, visit [thedacare.org](http://thedacare.org) or follow ThedaCare on social media. Members of the media should call Cassandra Wallace, Public and Media Relations Consultant at 920.442.0328 or the ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah switchboard at 920.729.3100 and ask for the marketing person on call.

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