



October 27, 2021

Contact: Jason Molinet
516-321-6705
jmolinet@northwell.edu

Northwell opens clinic to treat Belmont Park backstretch workers

ELMONT, NY – [Northwell Health](#) today announced the opening of a health clinic for Belmont Park workers in collaboration with the [New York Racing Association](#) (NYRA), which operates the track, and the [Backstretch Employee Service Team](#) (BEST) of NY, the nonprofit organization devoted to the health and social welfare needs of several thousand barn area workers.

The \$200,000, 1,000-square-foot health clinic will provide a continuum of care and offer wellness programs for the thousands of backstretch workers at Belmont Park. The free program is part of Northwell’s commitment to providing equitable care to all New Yorkers. A high percentage of backstretch employees are immigrants who live at the track.

“Clinics like this one are important because they allow quick access to care, before health issues become health care emergencies,” said [Michael Dowling](#), president and CEO of Northwell Health. “This community dedicated to the sport of thoroughbred racing deserves a commitment to wellness – and Northwell Health is happy to provide it. That’s our passion.”

Northwell provided coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) testing for Belmont workers beginning in 2020 and provided COVID-19 vaccines in 2021. Now, Northwell will offer clinic hours three days a week with the opportunity for specialty services as needed. The clinic features two exam rooms and lab services for point of care testing. [Tochi Iroku-Malize, MD](#), senior vice president and chair of family medicine, will serve as medical director.

“This important partnership will increase access to high quality health care for the backstretch community at Belmont Park,” said David O’Rourke, President and CEO of NYRA “Northwell Health has already made a significant impact through their COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts here at Belmont, and we thank them for their dedicated service to the men and women working every day to support thoroughbred racing in New York State.”

While language barriers and cultural biases are often reasons why some immigrants don’t seek care, Northwell has gotten out of the starting gate quickly. It offered flu vaccinations this week for nearly 100 backstretch workers.

“Northwell came to the rescue of the backstretch workers during the pandemic and now BEST is thrilled to collaborate again with Northwell to provide the hard working backstretch workers of Belmont and Aqueduct with on-going, first-class, primary and preventative care,” said Paul Ruchames, executive director of BEST. “BEST is also deeply grateful for the steadfast and generous support from the New York Racing Association and the New York Thoroughbred

Horseman`s Association, without which none of the great achievements of the past 20 months and beyond, would be possible.”

One of those backstretch workers can attest to the need. Francisco Barrera grew up riding horses in his native Peru. At 47, he`s still exercising horses before dawn each day, putting thoroughbreds through their paces as one of thousands of backstretch employees at Belmont. Mr. Barrera has suffered a number of physical injuries working with these powerful animals over the decades. It can be dangerous but rewarding work, which is why he`s eager to see clinical care return to the backstretch at Belmont, bringing medical services to a hard-working community.

“It`s a big step for us,” said Mr. Barrera, a married father of three. “We are mostly immigrants. It is hard for us to get medical attention outside the track.”

Through Northwell`s ongoing efforts, more than 90 percent of backstretch workers are vaccinated, well above the New York State average. The health system anticipates handling more than 2,000 visits to the clinic in 2022.

MEDIA ASSETS

Photo (Credit Northwell Health): <https://northwellstudios.smugmug.com/2021-Events/October-Events-Folder/Belmont-Clinic-Opening/n-S5csx6/>

Video (Credit Northwell Health):

English: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WMupeu4kfPPKxO9dUiuIMD8izYFC57x9?usp=sharing>

Spanish: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-Al_u2q80lStjyeX1RiirmcDmqCHtOpk?usp=sharing

###

About Northwell Health

Northwell Health is New York State`s largest health care provider and private employer, with 23 hospitals, 830 outpatient facilities and more than 16,600 affiliated physicians. We care for over two million people annually in the New York metro area and beyond, thanks to philanthropic support from our communities. Our 77,000 employees – 18,900 nurses and 4,800 employed doctors, including members of Northwell Health Physician Partners – are working to change health care for the better. We`re making breakthroughs in medicine at the Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research. We`re training the next generation of medical professionals at the visionary Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell and the Hofstra Northwell School of Nursing and Physician Assistant Studies. For information on our more than 100 medical specialties, visit Northwell.edu and follow us @NorthwellHealth on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).