

# Healthy Living



## Life is better on the farm

Vascular team gets local  
patient back on her feet



**Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP**  
President and Chief Medical Officer  
MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

**Holly Bond Meyer**  
Healthy Living Editor

**Ruby Hawks**  
Assistant Editor & Photographer

**Deborah Gross**  
Writer

**Megan Johnson**  
Writer

**Sandy Ondrejcek**  
Designer & Photographer

Healthy Living is published by MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. The information is intended to inform and educate about health, not as a substitute for consultation with a physician.



# Letter from the president

Dear friends,

As winter approaches, I hope you're keeping well and looking forward to the upcoming holiday season. This time of year holds a special sense of anticipation, lending magic to our everyday lives.

When we think of presents—true gifts for our loved ones—I can think of little that matters more than our own health. Busy parents, in particular, often find themselves in a marathon leading up to the holidays, hoping to spark joy on children's faces. While I certainly relate to that stress, I remind everyone of the importance of taking care of ourselves now and always. Drink plenty of water, get adequate rest, keep up with annual screenings and physicals, and find indoor wellness activities you enjoy to stay active through the colder months.

This issue of *Healthy Living* reflects feelings of gratitude with reminders to listen to our bodies. You'll meet several patients with exceptional experiences at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, including Joanne, who struggled for decades before providers with MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute pursued answers for her unexplained swelling. With the support of endocrinologist Mohammad Al-Jundi, MD, patient Charlene regained her health after a surprising diabetes diagnosis. Lastly, you'll be introduced to Christine, who feels truly grateful for her husband's care at our Wound Healing Center.

Stories like these are why we do what we do, and support from our community is what helps make that possible. It was wonderful to see so many friendly faces at the hospital's 35th Annual Gala in October! Proceeds from this year's event benefit scholarships for future healthcare workers. Offering this support to students pursuing nursing, radiology, laboratory services, and many related fields is an honor and a necessity. Applications are open now for the 2023 scholarship cycle—be sure to check out the back cover for details and share with the students in your life.

During this season of thankfulness, I wish to extend my gratitude to the associates and medical staff of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital who work around the clock to care for our community. We are also deeply grateful for the many volunteers who dedicate so much of their time to helping others, including our patients and team members.

Wherever this holiday season takes you, I wish you all warm memories and good health!

Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital of St. Mary's County, its Medical Staff and Auxiliary, are non-discriminating in their admission, treatment, employment and membership policies. The hospital employs, offers membership, renders treatment and receives vendor services without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin or ancestry, marital status or status as a qualified disabled individual. Patients receive considerate and respectful care at MedStar St. Mary's regardless of the source of payment. MedStar St. Mary's Hospital's Payment Assistance Program provides free or reduced charges for care to patients who receive inpatient and outpatient services. This program is available for individuals who are not eligible to receive medical assistance from the state and meet specific income requirements. If you are interested in finding out if you qualify for payment assistance, please contact our Credit Office at 301-475-6039.

# Q&A with Melissa Meghpara, vascular surgeon

## Understanding vascular disease



Vascular surgeon **Melissa Meghpara, DO**, sees patients with a variety of arterial and venous concerns at the MedStar Health & Vascular Institute in Leonardtown, located in the Outpatient Pavilion behind MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. To make an appointment, call **240-434-4072**.

### Q. What is vascular disease?

**A.** Vascular disease includes a wide range of problems that affect your arteries and/or veins. These diseases can affect both large and small blood vessels, causing a variety of symptoms.

### Q. Who is most at risk to develop vascular disease?

**A.** Those at most risk include patients with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, renal failure, and a history of smoking. Vascular disease also increases as we age. All of these risks increase the buildup of plaque in your arteries which causes decreased blood flow to different areas of the body.

### Q. What are the most common vascular issues you see in your practice?

**A.** Most of our patients have peripheral artery disease (PAD).



These patients may experience pain in their legs while walking or at rest, and sores that won't heal. Many others see us for aortic aneurysms, a bulge in a major blood vessel; carotid disease, when blood vessels are clogged by fatty deposits, or painful varicose veins. We also assist hemodialysis patients with creation and maintenance of vascular access sites.

### Q. What are the treatment options for vascular disease?

**A.** With the current advances in treatment, we offer both minimally invasive endovascular procedures performed through a small access site in the artery or vein. Endovascular options often use balloons and stents to open blocked blood vessels. Traditional incisions or open procedures are reserved for those who do not qualify or who had endovascular procedures that failed. Open techniques either clear out plaque or reroute blood around a blockage. Additionally, varicose veins can be treated with ablation or sclerotherapy to close incompetent veins.

### Q. When would a vascular condition require surgery?

**A.** When aneurysms reach a certain size, we repair them to prevent rupture. Similarly, to reduce the risk of stroke, we offer surgery when carotid disease becomes a significant risk. In the extremities, when there is pain or tissue loss, we operate to alleviate the pain and prevent progression.

### Q. Are there any new advancements in vascular disease that you are excited about?

**A.** Several advances have been made in the endovascular treatment of aneurysms and carotid artery blockages. I am happy to offer these approaches as an alternative to open surgery. I am most excited to be bringing transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) to MedStar St. Mary's. TAVR allows us to open carotid narrowing with a stent.

### Q. What recommendations would you offer patients to maintain their vascular health?

**A.** Smoking is the #1 contributor to vascular disease. Decreasing and, ideally, quitting smoking can greatly reduce your cardiovascular risk. Controlling and preventing diabetes would be the next best way to maintain your vascular and overall health. There are many helpful tools to address both, and patients should not be afraid to ask for help.

# Grateful to be back on her feet

Local patient finds relief from vascular syndrome affecting blood, lymph flow

After 24 years struggling with unexplained swelling, exhaustion, sickness, and pain, Joanne feared this was her normal. The pain in one ankle—like an “icepick driven into bone”—was particularly awful. She had trouble sleeping. She couldn’t stand for long stretches. So much about her life had changed.

And until 2021, she said, she couldn’t find a healthcare provider who could truly help.

The swelling began in a single toe. Joanne, of St. Mary’s County, noted her feet would often ache in the mornings when she stood after waking—a minor inconvenience at first, as she could “walk it off.” Over two decades, however, the swelling (edema) and pain in her legs and feet intensified such that the now-retired Joanne worried that, after sitting for an hour on a commuter bus, she wouldn’t be able to get to her office building without a wheelchair.

Other regional providers saw Joanne but seemed stumped. Blood work and lab results were normal; she had no underlying health conditions. “They were all just pushing compression stockings—that, and telling me it was diet-related, to limit my salt,” shared Joanne. “I knew it wasn’t that. I was eating well, and I haven’t always been like this. I told the



After her vascular procedure, Joanne is back to teaming up with her husband to stack firewood—plus 350 bales of hay on the farm. “I’m not 100% yet, but I feel I have gone back about 14 years to when I could physically do so much more,” she shared.

physician, ‘I know what it feels like to feel good—and this isn’t it.’”

After other venous procedures and lymphatic drainage therapy had little effect, Joanne was at an unrelated medical appointment in Virginia. The team there grew concerned by her extreme swelling, as it turned out to be all over her body—and she realized this might be even more serious than she thought.

## Finding answers

Joanne buckled down with her evidence, collecting photos of strange bumps and discolored skin

that appeared overnight. Painful leg cramps continued to wake her at odd hours. She couldn’t stand for long stretches, and any type of exertion made her ill for days. Joanne could no longer help her husband with even the simplest duties on their small farm.

Looking for resources and help online, Joanne found the **MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute** at MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital. She was soon scheduled for a consultation with **Arthur Flatau, III, MD**. “From the moment I went into that office, I felt understood,” she said. “The nurse saw my feet and immediately said it looked like I had

lymphedema—a diagnosis that, up until that point, no one had been able to give me.”

As Joanne had undergone other venous procedures with no relief, it was time to investigate other reasons for her discomfort. Dr. Flatau and **Lisa Yager, MSN, CRNP, AGPCNP-C, CRN**, vascular nurse practitioner, met with Joanne. While initial imaging showed nothing unusual, the team went the extra mile to have an MRI approved. That testing and a follow-up intravascular ultrasound (IVUS) finally granted an explanation for Joanne’s decades of discomfort: she has May-Thurner Syndrome.

“May-Thurner occurs when a high-pressure artery sits atop a low-pressure vein, ultimately compressing it into the lumbar spine,” explained Lisa. “This interrupts typical blood flow from the legs and pelvis back to the heart. This compression can lead to narrowing and scarring of the iliac vein, requiring intervention and placement of a stent to help improve blood return.”

Symptoms often include feelings of heaviness in the legs, swelling, skin discoloration, varicose veins, and ulcers. Deep vein thrombosis and/or blood clots can also result.

Joanne discussed next steps with the team. If an IVUS showed the vein was more than 50% narrowed, a stent would be recommended to hold it open. Her procedure at MedStar St. Mary’s was scheduled for September—but Joanne almost didn’t go through with it.

“It was Lisa who kept me from backing out,” she said. “She really made me feel like everyone was looking out for me. And I thought, I’m getting sicker and having worse pain with each day. If it can help me, I want to do it.”

In preparation, Joanne was very impressed with the entire Perioperative Services team. “Everyone was so efficient and personable,” she said, “and the [operating room] was modern, beautiful—just like uptown. I was surprised, honestly! It put me at ease.”

After confirming her vein was more than 50% narrowed, a stent was placed to restore and improve circulation.

“After I woke up, I noticed immediately that the pain I’d been experiencing in my left ankle was gone,” she said. “The swelling was already going down. I had very little discomfort—in fact, I took a single pain pill. I’d been experiencing more pain just living day to day than anything related to the procedure.”

Since her surgery, Joanne has lost 10 pounds of fluid and gained more freedom of mobility. The pressure she’d been feeling throughout her body has eased. She’s sleeping comfortably, and can walk on hard surfaces again.

“It sounds like a little thing, but I couldn’t really walk anywhere without good shoes,” she said. “It felt like I had no padding between my bone, skin, and the floor. The pain was unbearable. Now it doesn’t hurt at all, unless I am on my feet for hours.”

The results have been “life-changing,” Joanne shared. And though she still has swelling due to lymphedema, she hopes more lymphatic therapy will help.

“Women often write symptoms off, or we have our symptoms ignored and written off for us,” shared Joanne. “This team pushed deeper.”

It’s a “huge relief,” she continued. “I would tell anyone that it was one of the best things I’ve ever done.”



**Lisa Yager, MSN, CRNP, AGPCNP-C, CRN**  
Vascular Surgery

**MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute at MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital**  
Outpatient Pavilion, second floor  
25500 Point Lookout Road,  
Leonardtown, MD

P 240-434-4072



## Thank you, Dr. Flatau!

Vascular surgeon **Arthur Flatau, III, MD**, retired from MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute this fall. As the site director for vascular surgery at MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital, Dr. Flatau focused on and expanded minimally-invasive endovascular surgery. He built a strong rapport with patients as a beloved provider and surgeon, praised for treating patients like his own family. Dr. Flatau was also a valued member of our Medical Staff since arriving at MedStar St. Mary’s in 2014. Thank you, Dr. Flatau—we wish you all the best in your retirement!

## Introducing Melissa Meghpara, DO

Dr. Meghpara is an attending vascular surgeon at MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute, now seeing patients in the Outpatient Pavilion at MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital. She is a graduate of the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine, and earned her master’s degree in Neuromusculoskeletal Science. Turn back to **page 3** for a Q&A with Dr. Meghpara.

# Fine-tuning the ED experience

New process designed to move non-emergency cases through the ED faster

When a critically ill or injured patient arrives at a hospital Emergency Department, it may take a fast-acting team of highly skilled medical providers to save that person's life. Although this situation is what these providers train for, these "drop-everything and run to the patient's side" moments can often cause a back up in the waiting room. Add in historic high levels of patients with seasonal viruses such as RSV in children and influenza, and the puzzle of reducing ED waiting times can become even more difficult to solve.

Over the past few months, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital has been trialing a new program to help reduce the time patients with less-severe, non-life-threatening illnesses or injuries spend waiting for care. The program known as RETA, was put in place in late October, just as seasonal illnesses were beginning to spike.

"RETA, the Rapid Evaluation and Treatment Area, is staffed with a dedicated



**The MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Emergency Department has been working to reduce patient wait times by trialing programs utilizing telehealth providers and a new Rapid Evaluation Treatment Area (RETA) for patients experiencing less severe symptoms.**

provider, nurse, and nurse tech to address less critical cases," said **James Damalouji, MD**, chair of Emergency Medicine for MedStar St. Mary's. "Many of the patients who come to the ED do not need an ED bed. Some can be treated and released quickly, others may need testing to assist in their diagnosis and treatment plan."

When a patient arrives at the ED, they undergo an evaluation process called triage. A highly trained nurse takes the patient's vitals and history and determines whether the patient needs to be placed in a bed in the ED or if they can wait in the waiting room until a provider becomes available.

"RETA is an intermediary step," said Dr. Damalouji. "Less severe cases are brought to RETA, tests can be performed or ordered, and the patient can be sent back out to the waiting area while results are gathered. The process is quicker than having the patient wait to be placed in an ED bed and then see a provider."

Once test results are returned, the RETA staff calls the patient back in for a consultation and discusses the next step in their care plan. Patients may be discharged home or even admitted to the hospital, if needed.

"Emergency care can be highly unpredictable, and ultimately our goal is to administer care quickly in the hopes of saving someone's life," said Dr. Damalouji. "The RETA model helps us treat those non-emergent cases in a more timely and effective manner, which leads to a more positive overall experience for our patients, and helps reduce the stress on our staff."

## The right care at the right time.

From cold or flu to a major life-threatening situation and everything in between, MedStar Health offers a variety of care options to meet your needs.

MedStar  
Medical Group  
Primary Care  
[MedStarHealth.org/  
PrimaryCare](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/PrimaryCare)



MedStar Health's family medicine physicians care for patients of all ages and deliver a range of services to all

members of the family. Your primary care provider will help you monitor chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, depression, or anxiety. Although your first scheduled visit may not be right away, it is important to establish a relationship with a provider and maintain yearly checkups and screenings.

Visit MedStar Medical Group Primary Care for injury and illness such as cold or flu symptoms, back or knee pain, urinary tract infection or yeast infection, STDs, birth control, weight loss, smoking cessation, cancer screening, mild to moderate asthma, migraine headache, and concussion.

**If you are experiencing a medical emergency, please dial 911.**

MedStar Health Urgent Care  
[MedStarHealth.org/UrgentCare](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/UrgentCare)



When you or your family members have an illness that is not life-threatening, MedStar Health Urgent Care provides convenient, comprehensive medical care. Walk-in visits are welcome, but an online check-in is recommended.

Use MedStar Urgent Care for injury needing X-ray, sore throat requiring strep or COVID testing, flu, pneumonia, urinary tract infection, mild to moderate asthma, stomach virus, migraine headache, concussion symptoms, and even preventative care such as sports and school physicals and pre-surgery physicals, and vaccines.

MedStar Health eVisit  
[MedStarHealth.org/eVisit](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/eVisit)



Immediate care can now come straight to you—wherever you are—via MedStar eVisit. Offering 24/7 video access 365 days a year, MedStar eVisit allows you to connect to care from your tablet, smartphone, or computer, no appointment needed. MedStar Health eVisit is not appropriate for conditions requiring a physician to look into your ear, listen to your heart or lungs with a stethoscope, or use other exam techniques, or tests.

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital  
Emergency Department  
[MedStarHealth.org/Emergency](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Emergency)



The Emergency Department offers treatment for major or life-threatening issues requiring immediate treatment. Do not drive yourself if you are experiencing a major or life-threatening issue, as the risk of an accident is increased.

Visit the Emergency Department for chest pain, difficulty breathing, severe abdominal pain, major head injury, heavy bleeding, severe dizziness or passing out, stroke symptoms, seizures, or other conditions with a risk of loss of life or limb.

# Annual Gala returns with A Red Carpet Affair

It was a night to remember as the community came together for the 35th annual MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Gala.

"A Red Carpet Affair was the perfect theme for our first in-person event in three years," said Holly Meyer, director of Marketing, Public Relations & Philanthropy. "We are extremely grateful for the unwavering support of our community and business partners."

The Gala is coordinated by the Philanthropy Committee of the MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Board of Directors. Money raised by this year's Gala will help support current scholarships and an endowment established to fund the scholarship program for decades to come. This year's event raised more than \$364,000.

"The scholarship program is an important resource to help us attract new healthcare professionals to our hospital," said Meyer. "It is an investment in the future of our non-profit hospital and our community."



## PRESENTING \$25,000 Christine Wray & John Felicitas

### PREMIERE - \$15,000

- Associates in Radiation Medicine
- G&H Jewelers
- Jayaraman Medical Associates LLC
- Dave & Pam Jamieson
- Pat & Shep McKenney
- MedStar Shah Medical Group
- Jennifer Blake Meyer

### DIAMOND - \$10,000

- AMEWAS, Inc.
- The Cherry Cove Group
- CMI General Contractors, Inc.
- The MIL Corporation
- St. Mary's Academy Class of 1972

### PLATINUM - \$6,000

- Anne Banfield, MD, FACOG
- AV3, Inc.
- ASEC, Inc.
- James & Coleen Damalouji
- Sam & Mimi Novello
- Specialty Systems, Inc.
- Ed & Timea Turbush

### GOLD - \$4,000

- AIRtec, Inc.
- Dr. Anna Choi & Mr. Richard Ferraro

- KBR, Inc.
- Michael & Jessica Meisel

### SILVER - \$2,500

- C3 Innovations Inc.
- Tom Clark & Paige Painter
- Cogito Innovations, LLC
- College of Southern Maryland
- FGS, LLC
- Jerry Lewis Roofing, Inc.
- The Law Office of Joann M. Wood, LLC
- Conor M. Loughran, Realtor
- Perlectric
- PNC Bank
- Printing Press Inc.
- Sabre Systems Inc.
- Serenity Place, LLC
- Shady Lane Construction, LLC
- SMECO
- Taylor Gas Company, Inc.
- WesBanco Bank, Inc.

### PORTRAIT ROOM - \$2,500

- Brinsfield Funeral Home, P.A.

### BRONZE - \$1,000

- AM Pierce & Associates
- Patricia Armstrong & Mike's Bikes
- Baldwin, Briscoe & Steinmetz, P.C.
- Austin & Pamela Barnard
- Tom & Jan Barnes
- Annette L. Broner
- Community Bank of the Chesapeake
- Compliance Corporation
- Mark & Pam Darrah
- Kristine & John Greely
- Buzz & Patty Hall
- Helen Mattingly Wernecke, Realtor®
- Amy & Paul Impelluso
- Glen & Barbara Ives
- Gary & Michele Kessler
- Law Offices of Kevin J. McDevitt
- Alfred S. Mattingly
- Holly & Steve Meyer
- Karen & Stephen Michaels
- Mindoula and CareMind Health
- Robert & Virginia Morris
- Naval Systems, Inc.
- Phocus Video Communications
- PSI PAX, Inc.
- Nick Stellway, CCIM
- Leslie Taylor
- Yahia & Salwa Tagouri
- Tim & Cindy Riti
- Lori & Rick Werrell
- Nick & Dawn Yeitakis



## It's not too late...

If you would like to support the MedStar St. Mary's Hospital scholarship fund and endowment through the 2022 Gala, visit [MedStarHealth.org/RedCarpet](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/RedCarpet) and select **Give Now**.

# Moving forward

After a surprising diabetes diagnosis, Charlene Skinner finds the right path to help her regain her health

Charlene Skinner was experiencing unexplained fatigue. As an educator in Prince George's County working from home during the pandemic, she would teach a class and participate in a meeting and feel so exhausted she would have to take a nap. She also had started to experience extreme thirst.

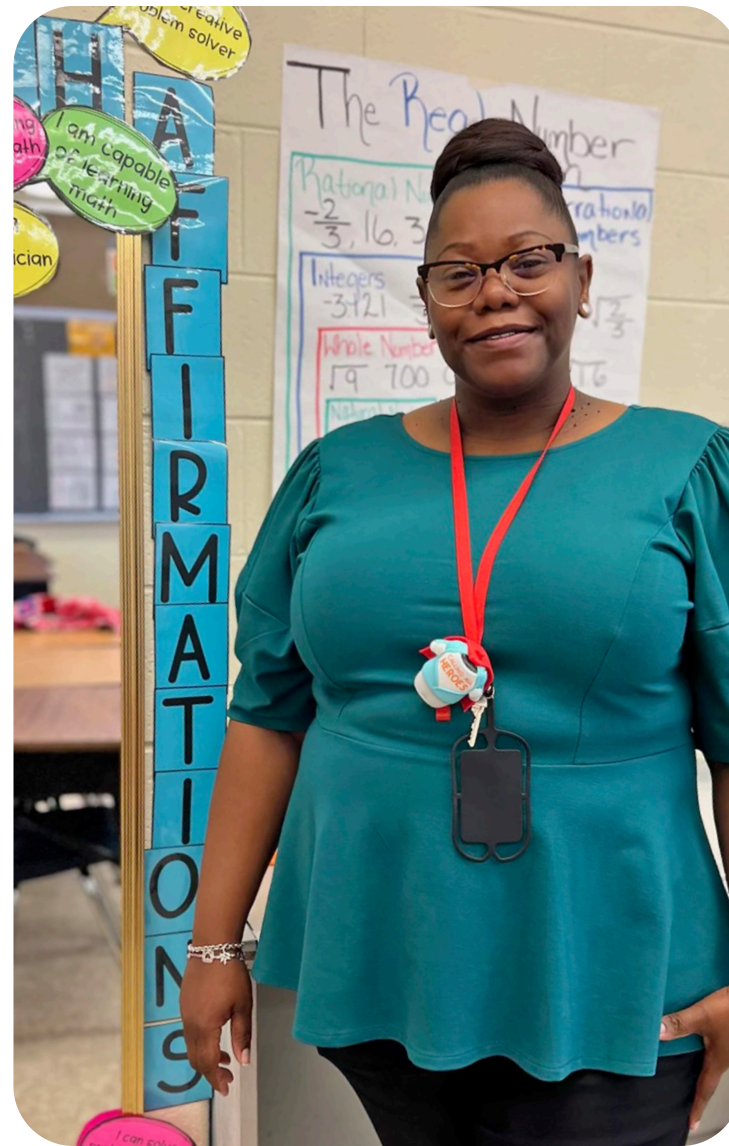
"I am not a water drinker, but it was to the point that when I drank water, it was good. It was really quenching my thirst and I had begun getting up in the middle of the night to drink water," said Charlene, a 41-year-old mother of two teenage daughters, pictured on right. "My daughters were the ones to say, 'Mom, you need to go to the doctor because something is going on.'"

The diagnosis that came with that doctor's visit was a shock to Charlene—type 2 diabetes. A pre-appointment blood test had measured her hemoglobin A1C level—her estimated average glucose level over the past two to three months—at 10, well above normal or prediabetic levels.

Charlene began checking her blood sugar three times a day and started the medication Metformin. Although her blood sugar improved, she had new problems to deal with—extreme medication side effects.

"The medication made my stomach so upset," said Charlene. "I couldn't exercise, people would invite me over and I wouldn't go because of what might happen, and I could barely work. I kept trying to tell every doctor I saw that the medication was making me miserable, but no one would listen to me. They would adjust the medication, but it was working so they wouldn't take me off of it. It was hard for me."

It was a chance meeting in one of those doctor's



waiting rooms and a recommendation from another patient that led Charlene to the office of **Mohammad Al-Jundi, MD**, endocrinologist.

"Dr. Al-Jundi asked how I was doing, and I just let it all out," she said. "He listened to me, and he immediately started talking about an alternative medication, and that changed my life."

"Although Metformin is often one of the first medications we try for type-2 diabetes patients, it is not the only medication available and it may not be the right medication for everyone," said Dr. Al-Jundi.

Charlene switched her medication to Jardiance and followed Dr. Al-Jundi's advice to meet with a dietitian to help her learn how to choose foods and better balance her diet. She also began exercising regularly and, as a result of her healthy changes, lost weight.

"Charlene has taken all the right steps to control her

diabetes and she has made tremendous progress," said Dr. Al-Jundi. "It is so exciting to see patients take charge of their health through simple changes that reap tremendous rewards."

"At my most recent appointment, I thanked Dr. Al-Jundi for listening to me," said Charlene, "and I told him he had changed my life."



**Mohammad Al-Jundi, MD**, sees patients at MedStar Medical Group Specialists at St. Mary's, located at 23140 Moakley St., Suite 2 in Leonardtown, MD



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Al-Jundi](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Al-Jundi) to learn more.

## Advanced wound care: Making a difference with hyperbaric oxygen therapy

Christine Perkins knew her 83-year-old husband, Sam, was getting great care in the MedStar Health Wound Healing Center in Leonardtown. She knew because she was by his side for every minute of his treatment.

In 2001, Sam suffered a hemorrhagic stroke which left him with aphasia, a communication disorder caused by the damage to the left side of his brain. Sam, who was prediabetic, also had developed numbness in his feet.

"He had an ulcer on the bottom of his foot that wouldn't heal, which became infected and exposed the bone," said Christine, pictured on right.

Sam was referred to the Wound Healing Center where he had a consultation with wound care specialist **Richard Greengold, MD**. In order to heal the bone infection in Sam's foot, Dr. Greengold prescribed 60, 90-minute sessions of hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy involves placing a patient in a pressured chamber filled with pure oxygen. In the high-pressure environment the patient can breathe in more oxygen which is then carried throughout the

body in their blood. The extra oxygen helps fight infection and stimulates the release of growth factors and stem cells which promote healing.

Sam began his therapy in October 2021, and due to his communication challenges, Christine was by his side at every appointment. Sam felt very comfortable in the hyperbaric chambers and often fell asleep quickly after going in leaving Christine to talk with his care providers.

"We laughed all the time, talking about our families. It was never a dull moment; the time went quickly," said Christine.

By the time Sam had completed his therapy in March 2022, his wound had completely healed. Sadly, Sam passed away in October 2022 from another stroke and when the Wound Healing staff heard, several reached out to Christine with messages of condolences.

"The Wound Healing staff was excellent," Christine said. "They went out of their way to make us comfortable. I made such great friends and I still keep in touch with them."



Foot ulcers and wounds that won't heal are common issues for patients with prediabetes and diabetes. To learn more about the MedStar Health Wound Healing Center in Leonardtown, call **240-434-7670**.

## Learn to manage your diabetes

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital offers a four-week diabetes self-management program which allows participants to engage in conversations about their experience with diabetes, blood sugar monitoring, healthy eating and activity, and long-term disease management. Call **301-475-6019** for more information.

Visit page 19 for a listing of more classes and programs designed to help those with diabetes and prediabetes live healthier.

# Inbox

"I would like to give a big virtual hug and huge thank you to each and every nurse, doctor, tech and specialist who had a hand in the delivery and care of my daughter, Navi, and my follow up care when I came back a few days later with postpartum preeclampsia. You all do your job with such care and compassion, reassuring me every step. I have never felt so genuinely cared about and I know you guys do this every day and with every patient, I'm sure. Special acknowledgments to nurses Sarah, Stephanie, Brielle, and Polly; breastfeeding consultant Jenna, Dr. Checca and the male pediatrician that cared for my baby after delivery. You all have truly found your calling! Please rest assured that you'll be in great hands delivering here."

**-Charmaine W., via Google reviews**

"Excellent care!! I took my 80-year-old mother to the hospital today because she had a bad fall. The triage nurse (Kelly) was absolutely amazing. She took so much time with my mom and stayed involved the entire time we were there. The doctor was so thorough, gentle and kind. He listened well and explained everything. Her attending nurse Gabby was equally attentive. Even the lady at the front desk went out of her way to make sure she was well taken care of."

**-Holly L., via Facebook**

"Hubby was sent to hospital COVID positive [with] low oxygen levels ... the staff in the Emergency Department could not have been any nicer. First time there and I felt we were treated more like people and not just a patient."

**-Lori R., via Facebook**



"I have worked in healthcare for 20+ years... I have NEVER seen service like this. I am from Chicago and in town for my uncle—who is in the ICU. Every single person from the front door to the doctors, they have been nothing short of amazing!! We are going to hospice care—special shout out to his phenomenal nurse Meghan, the hospice nurse Michelle, palliative care Dr. LaPenta, Dr. Dang. Everyone! ... Thank you!"

**-Brandy R., via Google review**

"I am most grateful to the staff who took such wonderful care of me [after contracting COVID-19], most especially, Christian, who patiently held my hand and helped calm my fears and anxiety when I needed it. ... I am most thankful God and these amazing health care professionals took such good care of me."

**-Sandy D., via Facebook**



Patient and family feedback is vital to helping us fulfill our mission to deliver the best care and experience to every patient, every day. Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Feedback](https://www.medstarhealth.org/Feedback) to give us your thoughts on a hospital or service experience.

# Helping our eyes to age well

Is poor vision just part of getting older? While many adults do develop cataracts, glaucoma, or macular degeneration, particularly if they have a family history, these conditions do not have to be accepted as an inherent part of aging.

"It's not at all uncommon to see healthy folks in their 90s with no eye problems at all," said **Jorawer Singh, MD**, ophthalmologist and cornea and refractive eye surgeon with MedStar Eye Physicians. "The key—and what we emphasize to patients—lies in managing other health conditions that can, if ignored, lead to profound vision loss."

## Take control of your eye health

Dr. Singh recommends that patients:

- **Manage chronic health conditions.** Diabetes and high blood pressure, in particular, can have a strong impact on the eyes. Treating these conditions directly improves eye health while helping to avoid serious complications.
- **Schedule regular vision screenings.** Comprehensive eye exams check for diseases in their earliest stages, when treatment is most effective. An optometrist or ophthalmologist will also measure your visual acuity (sharpness), depth perception, eye alignment, and eye movement—all central to good vision.
- **Wear sunglasses year-round.** Shades help preserve eye health by blocking damaging ultraviolet (UV) light outdoors. Look for a pair that offer 100% UV protection.
- **Do not smoke.** If you do, make a plan to quit. Tobacco use increases your risk of developing cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, two serious eye diseases that lead to vision decline.

"If you take care of yourself and come in for regular screenings, an overwhelming majority of patients can expect to retain excellent vision for the entirety of their lives," said Dr. Singh. "Eyes can and will outlast almost all other parts of our bodies."



## Training and innovating with new surgical residents

MedStar Eye Physicians of Charlotte Hall is the only Academic Center of Excellence in Southern Maryland, with ophthalmology residents from Georgetown University School of Medicine rotating with Dr. Singh full-time to learn advanced eye surgery at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

"We're proud to have a role in training the next generation of eye surgeons at our practice," Dr. Singh said. "With the help of these brilliant young doctors, we now seek to conduct academic research and enroll in cutting-edge clinical trials that will help propel ophthalmology forward into an exciting and innovative future."



### Jorawer Singh, MD

Ophthalmologist, cornea and refractive eye surgeon

MedStar Eye Physicians  
30065 Business Center Drive, Suite 1  
Charlotte Hall, MD  
P 301-290-5915



Virginia Morris with her husband, Robert; daughter, Molly; and pup, Luke.

# A head start on treating concussions

From youth sports injuries to household accidents, hitting our heads can be more than just a headache.

Concussions, a mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), are caused by the brain bouncing or twisting in the skull—the result of a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Undiagnosed, concussions can stretch and damage brain cells with severe or lasting impacts.

Virginia Morris of Leonardtown was at work when she threw her head back in a laugh and collided with a cabinet door handle—a “freak accident” she initially downplayed. After days of dizziness, headache, light sensitivity, and fatigue, she reached out to her primary care provider and, later, a neurologist. They confirmed the concussion, but Virginia was offered conflicting guidance on where to go from there—and what to expect as she healed.

Seeking advice from MedStar Health Physical Therapy at Hollywood, Virginia learned about the new **MedStar Health Concussion Clinic**. Utilizing MedStar Health’s network of more than 20 specialty-trained providers throughout the region, the clinic offers convenient, consistent care for these injuries.

#### Services include:

- Evaluation of suspected concussions
- Treatment for concussion patients of all ages
- Return-to-play and return-to-school plans for athletes
- Care plans for safe return to work
- Collaborative care with neurological, rehabilitative, vestibular, and sports medicine specialists
- Pre- and post-injury cognitive testing, and more

For Virginia, the concussion specialists were “so reassuring from the beginning,” she said. “I especially appreciated that everything was virtual—I didn’t have to drive anywhere. With my symptoms, that would have been hard.”

The clinic team walked her through pre-registering and completing step-by-step assessments at home. Virginia then connected with a provider virtually to go over results and next steps. “Everything was so thorough. I felt really comforted—here was a specialist who understood what I was going through,” said Virginia. “My doctor also reassured me that all the emotional ups and downs I’d been feeling were normal for someone with a brain injury.”

Equipped with personalized return-to-work plans and recommendations for supplements, diet, and rest, plus two months of vestibular physical therapy, Virginia gradually resumed normal activities while watching for signs that she was overdoing it. Most of her symptoms have now resolved.

“I’m really grateful for the Concussion Clinic, and I hope more people learn about this service,” said Virginia. “I certainly wish I had known about it from the start.”



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Concussion](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Concussion) or call **855-748-4868** to reach the Concussion Clinic team.

Please note: MedStar Health Concussion Clinic does not provide acute, emergency evaluations. **Call 911** or take safe transport to the nearest Emergency Department or urgent care center, if needed.



## Signs of concussion after a hit/fall

- Person appears dazed, stunned, or confused
- Can’t recall events prior to or after the incident
- Moves clumsily with dizziness or blurry vision
- Loses consciousness, even briefly
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes
- Experiences headaches or “pressure” in the head
- Bothered by light or noise
- Experiences nausea/vomiting
- Feels sluggish, groggy, or just “not right”

Signs and symptoms generally show up soon after the injury. However, you may not know how serious the injury is at first and some symptoms may not show up for hours or days, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



# You've got a friend in us: Hospice cares for whole family

For those with a life-limiting illness, the physical and emotional demands can be overwhelming. The team at **Hospice of St. Mary's** is there to provide a unique resource of wraparound care in varying levels—comfort, guidance, and support through some of life's most challenging circumstances for patients and families alike.

"Hospice care is much more than a visiting nurse and medication management," said **Kara Rawlings, MBA, BSN, RN, CHPN, CM/DN**, director of nursing (Hospice & Palliative Care), MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. "We're a wealth of resources that can be transformative for those grappling with end-of-life decisions and needs—a whole team of people focused on supporting you in whatever way makes the most sense, and will do the most good for the family."

All hospice care holds the needs of the patient and their family at its center. Levels of care include:

- **Team support at home:** Nurses, hospice aides, social workers, office staff members, chaplains, and other associates work together to care for the patient at home by providing symptom and medication management; personal care; emotional and spiritual support; and more.



- **In-patient care:** Patients with uncontrolled symptoms may be admitted and receive hospice in-patient care at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital until symptoms can be managed, at which point they can be discharged home or to the Hospice House.
- **Respite care:** Families experiencing caregiver fatigue may request respite care, which provides a break to those caring for a loved one at home.
- **Continuous care:** Patients requiring a nurse to be present to manage symptoms for several hours in a 24-hour period receive continuous care, which also provides family support to help ensure the patient's comfort.

As an alternative to a patient's own home, **Hospice House of St. Mary's** in Callaway provides a place of comfort for individuals at the end of life. With six private bedroom suites, a living room, and dining room, the Hospice House offers 24-hour care for residents. The house has recently undergone enhancements to modernize the main living area and individual suites. While insurance does not cover Hospice House residency, fundraisers and generous philanthropic partners help Hospice of St. Mary's to provide an adjusted rate to county residents based on their ability to pay.

"Our Hospice team really knows this community; many have very deep roots here," said Kara. "The staff is so mission-driven—their compassion and heart shows in everything they do. I have always felt it was a gift to care for people at the end of their lives. We feel grateful to do this work and assist our patients every day."

## Who is eligible for hospice services?

Patients determined to be at the end stages of illness (doctor prognosis of six months or less to live) are entitled to care from Hospice of St. Mary's. The six-month prognosis is merely a guideline; hospice re-evaluates patients every 60 days and, as long as their conditions continue to decline, they are re-certified for hospice coverage for as long as they live.

Please call Hospice at **301-994-3023** to discuss a patient's eligibility or receive assistance 24/7.



Visit [HospiceOfStMarys.org](https://www.HospiceOfStMarys.org) to learn more, or call **301-994-3023**.

## 2022 Festival of Trees



**Saturday, Dec. 3**  
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

University of Maryland at Southern Maryland  
44219 Airport Road, California, MD

[FOT2022.givesmart.com](https://www.FOT2022.givesmart.com)

Kick off the holiday season with Hospice of St. Mary's 15th annual fundraiser! Don't miss beautifully-decorated trees and wreaths that create a winter wonderland for the whole family. Bid on your favorites while enjoying live music, a visit with Santa, and more!

## Coping with grief during the holidays

The anticipation and preparation for holidays can be challenging in itself. Adding grief following the loss of a loved one can be a recipe for stress. **Sadiqa Bah**, Hospice of St. Mary's bereavement coordinator, offered these tips for the holiday season:



1. Understand that things will be different without your loved one.
2. Create a new tradition to celebrate them—set a place at the table, design a special ornament in their honor, play or sing their favorite song.
3. Surround yourself with people who are supportive and healthy for your healing. Toxicity is not welcomed.
4. Don't isolate yourself. It's tempting to shut down and avoid social interaction, but this increases the risk of falling into despair.
5. Allow yourself to feel and experience the roller coaster of emotions: joy, sadness, anger. Know that your grief experience is unique to you—it's your own. Others cannot dictate how you should feel.
6. Find comfort in community. Ideas include volunteering, donating to a charity in honor of your loved one, or adopting a family for the holidays.
7. Avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as self-medicating with alcohol or drugs or indulging in risky/reckless behavior.
8. Give yourself permission to take a break. Rest your mind, body, and soul. Take care of yourself.

## Meet our new medical professionals.

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital is pleased to introduce the newest members of our medical staff. We strive to bring high-quality physicians and specialists to Southern Maryland to meet our community's needs close to home. For a full list of local MedStar Health provider resources, visit [MedStarHealth.org/Doctors](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Doctors) for individual doctor profiles.

### Mark Real, MD Gastroenterology



Mark Real, MD, is a graduate of Georgetown University School of Medicine. Dr. Real completed his internal medicine residency at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital where he also completed fellowships in gastroenterology and advanced endoscopy. Dr. Real also holds a Bachelor of Science in biochemistry from Georgetown University. He is board certified in internal medicine and gastroenterology and specializes in advanced endoscopic

procedures, such as ultrasound and endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP). Dr. Real sees patients in the Outpatient Pavilion, 25500 Point Lookout Road, second floor, Leonardtown, MD. To make an appointment, call **240-434-4100**.



### Jamie Adams, MD Anesthesiology

**Employed by:**  
MedStar Medical Group  
Anesthesiology

**Medical school:**  
Mercer University School  
of Medicine



### Joelle Wazen, MD Radiology

**Employed by:**  
MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

**Medical school:**  
University of Balamand

## Put your healing in our hands

Expert surgical care at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

There are a variety of reasons patients might seek out a consultation with a general surgeon—your doctor recommends surgery, you are having a medical emergency, or you choose to have an elective procedure. Whatever the reason, you can trust the surgeons at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital have the knowledge and expertise to address your concern and help you recover as quickly as possible.

**Sameer Alrefai, MD**, and **Gustavo Franco Vasquez, MD** now perform minimally invasive procedures using the daVinci robotic surgical system. Their offices are located on the second floor of the MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Outpatient Pavilion in Leonardtown.



**Sameer Alrefai, MD, FACS**  
Bariatric and General Surgery



**Gustavo J. Franco Vasquez, MD, FACS**  
General Surgery

To make an appointment with Dr. Alrefai or Dr. Franco Vasquez, call **240-434-4088**.

# Winter 2022 calendar

## Women's Wellness Day returns in March

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital's Women's Wellness Day returns Saturday, March 11. The event will be held at the Dr. James A. Forrest Career and Technology Center and will feature a variety of speakers and health screenings. Preregistration is required. Call 301-475-6019.



**Class availability is subject to change. After enrolling, you will be notified should a session need to be postponed. Because no registration is required for most support groups, please reach out using the phone numbers below to verify if meetings are still scheduled.**

### Support groups

Health Connections at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital hosts support groups including:

- **Bariatrics** (virtual, second Saturday of each month, 10 a.m.; initial registration required)
- **Lactation** (every Wednesday, 10 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.; registration required)
- **Parkinson's** (second Tuesday of each month, 4:30 p.m.)
- **Stroke Survivors** (second Tuesday of each month, 1 p.m.)

Call 301-475-6019 for details or to register.

### Cancer care

#### Cancer support group

Meetings held the first and third Wednesday of each month. Call 240-434-7241 to register, or search and join "MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Cancer Support Group" on Facebook.

**Breast cancer support group**  
Held virtually through Microsoft Teams. Upcoming dates include

Dec. 12, Jan. 9, Jan. 24, Feb. 6., and Feb. 22, all at 6 p.m. To receive an email invite or learn more, please call 240-695-6904. Visit [Facebook.com/groups/MedStarBreastHealthProgram](https://www.facebook.com/groups/MedStarBreastHealthProgram) for support.

### Diabetes education

#### Take Control of Diabetes

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital offers one-on-one appointments with our registered dietitian. A provider's order for diabetes education is required. Services may be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most private insurance plans. Call 301-475-6019 for more information.

#### Simple Changes (Pre-diabetes)

Begins March 15, 5:30 p.m. Participate in our free, year-long class designed to eliminate possible diabetes risk factors by making simple, healthier changes in your life. Program includes free body composition screenings, handouts, giveaways, and support between sessions. This one-year program is a combination of weekly and monthly sessions. Call 301-475-6019 to register.

### Childbirth & family education

#### Parents-to-Be Workshop

Offered monthly: Dec. 3, Jan. 7, Feb. 4. 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Health Connections, \$100/couple. Combines four traditional parenting classes into a one-day overview. Topics include

childbirth, breastfeeding, infant CPR, and practical baby care skills such as bathing and diapering. In-person sessions and online options available. Call 301-475-6019 to sign up. Please note: some classes require a minimum number of participants to hold the course. If the need arises to cancel a class, we will make every effort to accommodate you on an alternate date.

### Safe Sitter

Jan. 21, March 25, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m., Health Connections, Outpatient Pavilion, \$65

Adolescents 12-14 learn babysitting tips, basic first aid, and CPR. In-person session. Call 301-475-6019 to sign up.

### Pulmonary

#### Tobacco Cessation Program

Virtual program to help participants quit using tobacco products through behavioral modifications, stress management, and other techniques. Visit [SMCHD.org/Tobacco](https://www.SMCHD.org/Tobacco) for dates and registration.



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Classes](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Classes) to learn more about community classes and support groups.

25500 Point Lookout Rd.  
Leonardtown, MD 20650

**MedStar St. Mary's Hospital**



Read us online!

[MedStarStMarys.org/HealthyLiving](https://www.MedStarStMarys.org/HealthyLiving)

First Last Name  
Address Line 1  
Address Line 2  
City, State, Zipcode Here

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/OptOut](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/OptOut)  
to be removed from future mailings.

**Follow your  
passion.  
We'll cover  
the costs.**

Local students pursuing healthcare careers are encouraged to apply for the **MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Scholarship!** Whether you're a recent high school graduate or returning to school to launch a second career, the hospital supports scholarship recipients pursuing many fields, including:

- Nursing
- Radiology
- Respiratory therapy
- Physical, occupational, and speech therapy
- Laboratory technology
- Pharmacy services
- Many non-clinical fields within the hospital, and more!

Students in St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert counties may apply now through February 2023.

Each award covers payment for tuition, books, and fees associated with the degree or certification up to \$24,000, based on plan of study. In return for receiving the scholarship, recipients commit to working at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital for a predetermined length of time—with many opportunities ahead!



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/StMarysScholarship](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/StMarysScholarship)  
to download an  
application or learn more,  
or scan this QR code:

