

# HealthLINK

SUMMER 2021

YOUR CONNECTION TO HEALTH & WELLNESS

## INSIDE:

How Valley Health stepped up to fight COVID-19. / Advances in AFib treatment. / Tips for staying healthy on vacation. / Expert advice for varicose veins.

 **ValleyHealth**  
*Healthier, together.*

## SUSPICIOUS FINDS

VALLEY HEALTH PHYSICIAN AND MUSIC LOVER  
DAVID SWITZER, MD, TOUTS THE BENEFITS  
OF EARLY DIAGNOSES THROUGH SCREENINGS

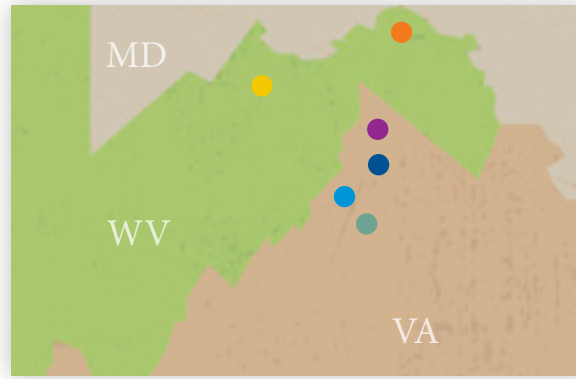
# WELCOME

## WITH ONE VOICE

Some facts are agreed upon by medical experts: Health screenings can catch disease early, vaccines save lives, and our community is stronger for the ways we pulled together during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, if you are a music fan (like family physician David Switzer, MD, featured on our cover), you might say Valley Health's experts are "singing in unison" on these topics, covered on the following pages.

Treatment options for those with atrial fibrillation and varicose veins, along with tips for staying healthy during your vacation, are also included in this issue. So enjoy the mountains or beach ... and don't forget to pack *HealthLINK* in your summer tote!

Want to ensure home delivery of every issue of *HealthLINK*? Call 540-536-5325 or sign up at [valleyhealthlink.com/News](http://valleyhealthlink.com/News).



Valley Health is a not-for-profit system of hospitals, services and providers. For more information about the many ways we serve the health and wellness needs of the community, visit [valleyhealthlink.com](http://valleyhealthlink.com).

### Valley Health System includes:

- Winchester Medical Center (Winchester, VA)
- Hampshire Memorial Hospital (Romney, WV)
- Page Memorial Hospital (Luray, VA)
- Shenandoah Memorial Hospital (Woodstock, VA)
- War Memorial Hospital (Berkeley Springs, WV)
- Warren Memorial Hospital (Front Royal, VA)

### Additional locations and services:

- Employer Health
- Outreach Lab Services
- Rehabilitation Services (Inpatient and Outpatient)
- Urgent Care and Urgent Care Express
- Valley Health Home Health | West Virginia
- Valley Health | Spring Mills
- Valley Health Surgery Center
- Valley Medical Transport
- Valley Pharmacy
- Valley Physician Enterprise
- Wellness & Fitness Centers

→ For more information, visit [valleyhealthlink.com/locations](http://valleyhealthlink.com/locations).



### Valley Health System

Serving Our Community by Improving Health

### HealthLINK

The magazine of Valley Health System  
Serving the northern Shenandoah Valley and surrounding areas in Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland

#### Valley Health Board Leadership

- Joseph F. Silek Jr., Chair, Board of Trustees
- Brad Close, Chair, WV Board of Trustees

#### Executive Management

- Mark Nantz, President and CEO
- James Burton, Chief Information Officer
- Jeffrey Feit, MD, Population & Community Health Officer
- Peter Gallagher, Chief Financial Officer
- Floyd Heater, President, Warren Memorial Hospital
- Tom Kluge, SVP, Critical Access Hospitals
- Grady W. (Skip) Phillips III, SVP, Acute Care Hospitals
- Chris Rucker, Chief Strategy Officer and Chief of Staff
- Iyad Sabbagh, MD, Chief Physician Executive
- Elizabeth Savage, Chief Human Resource Officer
- Walt Sowers, Chief Legal & Compliance Officer

#### Hospital Leadership

- N. Travis Clark, President, Page Memorial Hospital and Shenandoah Memorial Hospital
- Floyd Heater, President, Warren Memorial Hospital
- Tom Kluge, President, Hampshire Memorial Hospital and War Memorial Hospital
- Grady W. (Skip) Phillips III, President, Winchester Medical Center

The information contained in *HealthLINK* is not a substitute for professional medical care or counsel. If you have medical concerns, consult a medical professional. A list of physicians, specialists and other care providers is found at [valleyhealthlink.com/physicians](http://valleyhealthlink.com/physicians).

*HealthLINK* magazine is published three times a year. Its purpose is to provide health and wellness information to the community and to connect area residents with health-care experts within Valley Health System.

Contact [marketingmail@valleyhealthlink.com](mailto:marketingmail@valleyhealthlink.com) or 540-536-5325 to be added to our mailing list; view *HealthLINK* online at [valleyhealthlink.com/news](http://valleyhealthlink.com/news).

#### Executive Editor:

#### Medical Editors:

Gregory Byrd, MD, Medical Director, Valley Health Medical Group  
Jeffrey Feit, MD, Population & Community Health Officer  
Nicolas C. Restrepo, MD, Quality & Patient Safety Officer  
David S. Switzer, MD, Medical Director, Primary Care, Valley Health Medical Group

**Health and Wellness Writers:** Sari Harrar, Mike McCullough, Kimberly Olson

**Photography:** Nick Matheson, Ginger Perry  
**Published by:** Diablo Custom Publishing

## HAMPSHIRE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL MARKS 10 YEARS



Hampshire Memorial Hospital staff members commemorate a decade of serving the community from the new hospital building opened in 2011.

Since June 2011 when Valley Health's new Hampshire Memorial Hospital building first opened, our staff have continued the tradition of serving Romney, West Virginia and the surrounding area with high-quality medical care. We now celebrate 10 years of offering advanced treatment solutions and expert care in the state-of-the-art facility, and honor the 75 staff who have served the community since we opened the doors of the new hospital, some of whom are pictured in the photo above.

"From emergency medicine to cardiology, general surgery, diabetes management, and so much more, HMM offers local residents care in their 'backyard,' rare for a community this size," notes Tom Kluge, VHS senior vice president, Critical Access Hospitals, and president, Hampshire Memorial Hospital. "I thank the hundreds of caregivers who have dedicated their career to providing their neighbors with exceptional health and wellness services close to home."



## AWARD-WINNING CARE FOR MOMS AND BABIES

Winchester Medical Center (WMC) was recently named to *Newsweek's* annual Best Maternity Care Hospitals list, one of only 217 U.S. hospitals honored for exceeding best-practice metrics that protect the health of moms and babies. "WMC is committed to following best practices in every aspect of care we provide to women and their newborns," says Grady W. (Skip) Phillips, III, VHS senior vice president, Acute Care Hospitals and president, WMC. "We have an exceptional team of caregivers who help welcome more than 2,500 babies each year, with high-risk pregnancy and neonatal intensive care services available if needed. We are honored to be among the top maternity centers in the country."

## PAGE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL EARNS CHEST PAIN CENTER ACCREDITATION

The American College of Cardiology (ACC) has recognized Page Memorial Hospital (PMH) with Chest Pain Center Accreditation. Hospitals that have earned ACC Chest Pain Center Accreditation have proven exceptional competency in treating patients with heart attack symptoms. They must take part in a multifaceted process that includes a rigorous on-site review and meet or exceed an array of stringent criteria.

“Earning this high mark of excellence for care of patients with chest pain is a result of much hard work from a dedicated and compassionate team ... and is a testament to our caregivers’ commitment to Valley Health’s mission of serving our community by improving health,” notes Portia Brown, FACHE, vice president, PMH.

## NATIONAL ACCREDITATION FOR RECTAL CANCER PROGRAM

Rectal cancer patients at Valley Health will receive care that meets the highest national standards. The Valley Health Cancer Center at Winchester Medical Center has earned accreditation from the National Accreditation Program for Rectal Cancer, a quality program of the American College of Surgeons. “We’re one of fewer than 25 rectal cancer programs in the country, and the only program in the region, that has earned accreditation,” says Devin Flaherty, DO, PhD, medical director, Valley Health Surgical Oncology, and program director of Valley Health’s rectal cancer program. “The rigorous accreditation process reflects the work, collaboration and commitment to excellence of the entire multidisciplinary rectal cancer team.” For more information, visit [valleyhealthlink.com/colorectalancer](http://valleyhealthlink.com/colorectalancer).

## NEW MEDICAL LEADERSHIP AT VALLEY HEALTH’S WEST VIRGINIA HOSPITALS

David Kliewer, MD, has joined the War Memorial and Hampshire Memorial Hospital teams as vice president, Medical Affairs. In this position, Dr. Kliewer will play a key role in patient safety and quality care improvements and physician and provider engagement. Dr. Kliewer has practiced anesthesiology with Winchester Anesthesiologists, Inc. since 2002 and has served in leadership roles at Winchester Medical Center and for Valley Health’s southern region hospitals. He will split his time between the two hospitals, beginning June 1.



David Kliewer, MD (right), has been named vice president of Medical Affairs for Valley Health’s two West Virginia hospitals.

## HONORS FOR WAR MEMORIAL PHYSICIAN



Valley Health congratulates Kevin T. McLaughlin, DO, Emergency Department physician at War Memorial Hospital, on earning Health Care Hall of Fame honors in *West Virginia Executive* magazine! Dr. McLaughlin was recognized for his dedication to the community as a physician and as deputy health officer for the Berkeley-Morgan County Board of

Health and because of his efforts to serve and educate the public during the COVID crisis. Kudos, Dr. McLaughlin!

## SURGERY AROUND THE REGION

### How to find surgical care, close to home

You may know that Winchester Medical Center offers advanced surgical services. But did you know that surgical specialists provide advanced care at locations across the region? Below are answers to your questions about how area residents can find top-notch surgical care from a Valley Health surgeon, close to home.

**Q:** WHAT TYPES OF SURGERY ARE PERFORMED AT MY REGIONAL HOSPITAL?

**A:** Valley Health employs and partners with many surgeons who routinely perform general abdominal surgery (gall bladder, hernia, bowel and upper GI procedures, for example); breast and gynecologic procedures; colonoscopy; and orthopedic, urologic, and ear, nose and throat procedures. Our surgeons use a combination of minimally invasive endoscopic and laparoscopic techniques, along with traditional open surgery, selecting the most appropriate approach for each patient’s unique needs.

Like many other Valley Health surgeons, Javeed Khan, MD, general surgeon at Hampshire Memorial Hospital, notes that locally performed, minimally invasive options offer numerous benefits to patients: “I am able to perform many types of surgery on an outpatient basis ... so patients often don’t have to stay overnight in the hospital. Now they can get surgical care close to home. When patients do have to stay overnight, they value having family nearby.”

**Q:** WHAT STEPS DO I NEED TO TAKE TO GET SPECIALIZED SURGICAL CARE IN MY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL?

**A:** Many patients are referred by their primary care provider to a specialist at a local Valley Health facility—and patients may be pleasantly surprised when a surgeon offers nonsurgical treatment options. “Not everyone who is referred needs surgery,” says Greg Hardigree, MD, orthopedic surgeon, who sees patients at Valley Health Shenandoah Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic. “I always begin with the simplest treatments. I have many tools in my medical tool box, and surgery is one, but not the only one. Often medication, therapy or injections are tried before surgery is considered.” He adds that his patients appreciate the convenience of getting care in their local community.

### CONTACT THESE RESOURCES FOR MORE INFO ON LOCAL SURGICAL SERVICES:

#### IN VIRGINIA

- **LURAY**
  - Valley Health Page Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic (540-743-2282)
- **FRONT ROYAL**
  - Valley Health General Surgery I Front Royal (540-635-0780)
  - Valley Health Warren Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic (540-636-0627)
  - Valley Health Warren Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic I Commerce Avenue (540-635-0800)
- **NEW MARKET**
  - Valley Health Shenandoah Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic I New Market (540-459-1340)
- **WINCHESTER**
  - Surgi-Center at Winchester Medical Center (540-536-4660)
  - Valley Health Surgery Center (540-536-5900)
  - Valley Health Winchester Surgical Clinic (540-536-0130)
  - Winchester Medical Center Surgical Services (540-536-8000)
- **WOODSTOCK**
  - Valley Health Shenandoah Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic (540-459-1383)

#### IN WEST VIRGINIA

- **BERKELEY SPRINGS**
  - Valley Health War Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic (304-258-6981)
- **MARTINSBURG**
  - Valley Health Multispecialty Clinic I Spring Mills (681-247-1280)
  - Tri-State Surgical Center (304-267-0556)
- **ROMNEY**
  - Valley Health Hampshire Memorial Hospital Multispecialty Clinic (304-822-4932)

Visit [valleyhealthlink.com/surgicalseervices](http://valleyhealthlink.com/surgicalseervices) for more information.

# NEW WARREN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

→ GRAND OPENING THIS SUMMER IN FRONT ROYAL!

SINCE 1951, PATIENTS IN AND AROUND WARREN COUNTY HAVE RECEIVED QUALITY CARE AT WARREN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL. NOW, WITH THE OPENING OF ITS NEW CAMPUS, VALLEY HEALTH CONTINUES THE TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE BY TAKING HEALTH CARE TO NEW HEIGHTS.



( **36** PRIVATE PATIENT ROOMS )

**520+**

TEAM MEMBERS SERVING THE COMMUNITY WITH EXCEPTIONAL CARE, 24/7

**\$100** MILLION

COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS

**3** OPERATING ROOMS, PLUS 1 CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION LAB STAFFED BY EXPERTS IN HEART AND VASCULAR CARE

MORE THAN

**300**

CREDENTIALLED PROVIDERS OFFERING SERVICES IN CARDIOLOGY AND VASCULAR SURGERY, ENT, FAMILY AND INTERNAL MEDICINE, IMAGING, OB/GYN, ORTHOPEDICS, PHYSICAL REHABILITATION, PULMONOLOGY, UROLOGY, AND MORE

→ Visit [valleyhealthlink.com/newWMH](http://valleyhealthlink.com/newWMH) for more information.

## ALL ABOUT VARICOSE VEINS

### TIPS FOR PREVENTING, DIAGNOSING AND TREATING THIS COMMON CONDITION

Warmer weather brings with it many delights, including trading jeans for shorts and bathing suits. But if you're one of the 40 million Americans who struggle with varicose veins, baring your legs may cause more discouragement than pleasure.

Ayorinde Akinrinlola, MD, vascular surgeon and chair of Valley Health's Peripheral Vascular Disease Council, offers expert information about this common condition.

**WHAT CAUSES THEM?** Varicose veins, and milder spider veins, are twisted and enlarged veins usually found in the legs. They are caused by weak or damaged valves in the veins that allow some blood to flow backward on its way to the heart. The blood pools in the vein, which results in stretching and twisting.



Dr. Akinrinlola notes that varicose veins are more common in women and tend to appear with age and run in families. Other risk factors include pregnancy, especially for women with multiple pregnancies; obesity; or sitting and standing for long periods of time. "Varicose veins that appear during pregnancy will likely disappear after childbirth," he adds.

**ARE THEY DANGEROUS?** You may notice achiness, burning, throbbing, itching, or swelling in your legs. In serious cases, patients may develop skin ulcers or bleeding, although these complications are rare. "Varicose veins are generally not dangerous, and they don't lead to deep vein blood clots, so I reassure my patients of the low risk," says Dr. Akinrinlola. "If patients have severe swelling, pain or skin discoloration, treatment may be necessary."

**WHAT ARE TREATMENT OPTIONS?** "I recommend the conservative treatment first: use of compression stockings," continues Dr. Akinrinlola. Available at pharmacies and medical supply stores, they help veins move blood more efficiently. These vary in pressure, so ask your doctor what to buy.

If problems persist, talk to your provider about treatments. Options include injections (sclerotherapy), endovenous thermal ablation with laser or radio-frequency energy, and surgical removal (stripping). Treatments are usually done in a physician's office, most under local anesthesia.

**CAN I PREVENT THEM?** There is no guaranteed way to prevent varicose veins, but healthy habits can help. Staying active, varying positions when sitting and maintaining a healthy weight are common-sense measures that can pay off in a number of different ways—including keeping your legs shorts ready.

→ *Have questions about treatment for your varicose veins? Talk with your primary care provider or schedule an appointment at Valley Health Vascular Surgeons at [540-536-6721](tel:540-536-6721).*



Physician and music aficionado David Switzer, MD, is an advocate for regular screenings.

# ALL ABOUT

➔ GET IN THE GROOVE WITH YOUR REGULAR SCREENINGS, WHICH CAN DETECT HEALTH PROBLEMS EARLY



What do Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and health screenings have in common? They are just a few of the topics patients might discuss with family physician, music lover and Luray record store owner David Switzer, MD, of Valley Health Page Memorial Family Medicine | Luray. In addition to sharing stories about his visit to Graceland, Elvis' home in Memphis, and his passion for country, rock and even punk-rock music, Dr. Switzer never misses a beat when he reminds his patients that screenings can save lives because they pinpoint health problems early, when they are most treatable.

"There is a perception that your body is wired to tell you when there's a problem, but the reality is that the body is wired to signal you when there is a *serious* problem," notes Dr. Switzer, board certified in family medicine. "The whole idea of screening is to head things off before they become serious."

#### NOW A BELIEVER

Don't believe in the value of health screenings? Ask 62-year-old Luray resident Marion Muehlebach to share his story. Like many, he rarely visits the doctor and had never had a colonoscopy. "I don't go to the doctor just to be going. I have to have a real reason," he says. And although he felt fine, Muehlebach decided not to delay his colonoscopy any longer. "I had a feeling that I needed to see about this."

He scheduled his first-ever colonoscopy for early February and was pleasantly surprised when he got a call from oncology nurse navigator Grace Nixon, RN, MSN, OCN. One of the team members collaborating on Valley Health's Colorectal Cancer Screening Pilot Study, Nixon contacts patients to make sure they understand the process and have the resources they need to complete their screenings.

"She walked me through everything step by step," Muehlebach continues. "Grace told me what I needed to buy and what I needed to do." That included drinking the required bowel prep drink, which Muehlebach gulped "to get it over with." She also called him following the procedure to check in on how he felt.

When Muehlebach went to Page Memorial Hospital for his

colonoscopy, the surgeon spotted trouble in the colon—three polyps, and one was precancerous. "If [Muehlebach] had waited another two or three years, the one polyp almost certainly would have become cancerous," Nixon says.

All of the polyps were removed during the procedure. "One of them was a centimeter big," Muehlebach says. "They caught it before it had gotten a hold into my body. I was anxious and relieved at the same time."

Muehlebach, now a believer in the importance of screenings and taking an active role in his own health care, will get a follow-up colonoscopy in three years and has also scheduled a checkup with his primary care physician. "I've had a hernia for a long time and I don't want something disastrous to happen," he says. "This has encouraged me not to take any more chances."



Thanks to his timely colonoscopy, Marion Muehlebach avoided a potentially worse outcome.

# SCREENINGS

# ALL ABOUT SCREENINGS

## ESSENTIAL TESTS SAVE LIVES

Evidence-based screenings can give you peace of mind. “And even if you get a positive result, problems caught and addressed early can potentially improve your outcome and save your life,” says Dr. Switzer. “The screenings we recommend in the Valley Health Medical Group—such as colorectal cancer screening—have met very high standards, demonstrating they find problems not just early but early enough that addressing them makes a difference.”

Here are some common conditions that screenings can help identify:

- **COLORECTAL CANCER.** This type of cancer is the second leading cancer killer of adults, after lung cancer, and many adults age 45 to 75 aren’t up to date with this screening. That’s unfortunate because screenings identify colon and rectal

cancers before they become dangerous and can even find precancerous polyps, as in Muehlebach’s case.

Colon cancer screening usually entails a colonoscopy, in which a physician inserts a flexible tube with a video camera into the colon via the rectum. In some cases, it’s the most appropriate tool, but there are also noninvasive alternatives.

You may be able to collect a stool sample at home and return it to your doctor’s office or a lab. Dr. Switzer emphasizes that the screening that works best is the one that you actually do. “If you agree to a colonoscopy in the doctor’s office and then walk out and say, ‘I’m not going to bother with that,’ then that’s not going to be an effective screening tool for you,” he says. “It is completely fair to ask, ‘Is there an alternative that I could use?’ Sometimes the answer is no, but a lot of times the answer is yes.”

## AT A GLANCE: NOT-TO-BE-MISSED SCREENINGS

FOLLOWING ARE IMPORTANT SCREENINGS SUGGESTED BY THE U.S. PREVENTIVE SERVICES TASK FORCE, AN INDEPENDENT PANEL OF EXPERTS WHO USE EVIDENCE-BASED METHODS TO ARRIVE AT THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS. SCREENINGS BACKED BY STRONG EVIDENCE GET A RATING OF A OR B. VISIT [USPREVENTIVESERVICESTASKFORCE.ORG](https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org) FOR THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION.

CONDITION	RATING	SCREENING	WHO IT’S FOR
High blood pressure	A	An inflatable rubber cuff, wrapped around the arm, is used with a stethoscope to assess arterial blood flow	Adults 18 and over
Colorectal cancer	A	Stool-based tests, colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy (similar to colonoscopy)	Adults age 45 to 75; some adults age 76 to 85 may also benefit
Cervical cancer	A	Pap smear, in which a speculum is used to collect cervical cells	Women age 21 to 65, every 3-5 years, or more if recommended by care provider
Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection	A	Blood or saliva test	People age 15 to 65 and pregnant women
Syphilis	A	Blood test	People at increased risk of infection and pregnant women
Hepatitis B	A	Blood test	Pregnant women
Hepatitis C	A	Blood test	Those age 18 to 79
Breast cancer	B	Screening mammogram, in which X-ray images of each breast are taken	Women age 50 to 74; before age 50, discuss with your doctor
Lung cancer	B	CT scan (patient lies on a table that slides into a large machine), which captures an image of the lungs	Adults age 50 to 80 who smoke or have quit within the past 15 years
Osteoporosis	B	Low-level X-ray called dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA)	Women over 65 or post-menopausal women under 65
Abdominal aortic aneurysm	B	One-time ultrasound screening	Men age 65 to 75 years who have ever smoked



Dr. Switzer discusses the colonoscopy procedure with a patient.

- **CERVICAL CANCER.** Most women age 21 to 65 should get a Pap smear every three to five years, or as recommended by their healthcare provider, to screen for cervical cancer. A Pap smear is sometimes recommended for women over 65, but your provider will give you guidance if this is the case. Most women who have had a complete hysterectomy with cervix removal for a reason besides cancer don't need this screening.
- **BREAST CANCER.** Women between 40 and 74 are encouraged to have a regular mammogram to screen for breast cancer. Factors like denser breasts may make mammography less reliable, so all women, regardless of age, should discuss their breast cancer risk—including family history—with their doctor.
- **LUNG CANCER.** If you're between 50 and 80 and a smoker—or a former smoker who quit less than 15 years ago—your doctor may suggest a low-dose CT scan to screen for lung cancer. “There is an amount of smoking history that is used as a threshold,” Dr. Switzer says. “Typically, it's 20 pack years of smoking or more, meaning that you smoked the equivalent of one pack a day for 20 years. If you've smoked two packs a day for 10 years, that's also 20 pack years.”
- **PROSTATE CANCER.** Screening recommendations for prostate cancer are more nuanced. Men between 55 and 69

should talk to their doctor about the pros and cons of a prostate-specific antigen-based (PSA) screening, which may reduce the risk of death from prostate cancer in some men.

- **SKIN CANCER.** Depending on your personal and family history, a skin cancer screening might be appropriate. This visual exam can be done during a routine physical or by a dermatologist.
- **OSTEOPOROSIS.** One in four women over age 65 is affected by osteoporosis, which weakens bones. You could be feeling spry—until you slip and fall, breaking a wrist, a hip or even your spine. A bone-density test can assess your bone health. Osteoporotic bones can then be strengthened with calcium and vitamin D supplementation or perhaps medication.
- **ELEVATED BLOOD PRESSURE.** Nearly everyone who visits their primary care provider gets their blood pressure checked. “If you have elevated blood pressure persistently, you are at increased risk for heart attack and stroke,” Dr. Switzer says. “We have interventions that reduce your risk. It's important to get your blood pressure checked, because 99.9 percent of the time, elevated blood pressure has no symptoms whatsoever.”
- **OTHER CONDITIONS.** Your provider may also give you a blood test to check for high cholesterol, another sneaky condition. And depending on your health history and lifestyle, you may get a blood test to screen for diabetes, or your doctor might recommend screenings for infectious but treatable diseases like HIV and hepatitis C. Additionally, an ultrasound screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm may be recommended for men 65 to 75 who ever smoked.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many patients have delayed scheduling routine medical care and preventive screenings, but Dr. Switzer emphasizes it's safe to get care at Valley Health hospitals, clinics and practices. “We now know more about COVID transmission, have extensive sanitizing protocols in place, vaccination is more widespread, and all our employees are screened daily. In fact, scheduling your screening sooner rather than later can prevent serious problems.”

It's easy to put off health screenings, especially if they make you nervous. But screenings can help you outsmart disease. “Fear usually stops us from doing what we need to do,” Muehlebach says. “But I would rather have peace of mind than worry that something's fixing to get me.”

“That healthcare screenings save lives is one thing all physicians agree on,” adds Dr. Switzer. That's music to the ears of everyone who values lifelong good health.



→ FIGHTING THE PANDEMIC WITH  
COLLABORATIVE, EVOLVING CARE

# COVID-19: ONE YEAR

Like other organizations around the world, Valley Health System (VHS) faced many challenges as the team prepared to fight COVID-19 in early 2020. We knew it was inevitable the virus would arrive and that it was highly contagious. Yet despite comprehensive preparation, there were many unknowns: How many in our community would require care in our hospitals? Would we have enough staff, PPE, ventilators, testing capacity, and other resources? What steps would our community need to take to minimize risks for residents?

“Our health system prepared for our first COVID patient since late December 2019, when we first began hearing about the virus,” says VHS Quality and Patient Safety Officer Nicolas C. Restrepo, MD, who oversaw the pandemic response inside Valley Health hospitals.

One year later, the physicians leading Valley Health’s COVID response say the effort illustrates community strength, innovation and flexibility—with

lasting benefits for health care and for relationships between the health system and the region we serve.

“Our COVID-19 response story is about community—a community of caregivers who jumped into the fray to serve others; community leaders who worked to keep schools, workplaces, nursing homes, and businesses safe; and community volunteers who turned out to help administer thousands of vaccines,” says VHS Population and Community Health Officer Jeffrey Feit, MD. “Everybody started doing the important things that needed to be done in a public health crisis. We’re stronger for it.”

Here are key ways Valley Health and the community responded to the pandemic, changing health care and strengthening relationships along the way.



# LATER

## INSIDE VALLEY HEALTH HOSPITALS

One of the first actions taken was eliminating patient visitation at Valley Health's six hospitals and three long-term care facilities to protect frail and elderly patients, followed by numerous other steps inside hospitals to meet the COVID-19 challenge. These innovations are some of the most noteworthy:

- **An evolving system of respiratory care for severe COVID cases:** High-Intensity Respiratory Units (HIRUs) were established at Winchester Medical Center (WMC) and staffed by specialized teams of critical care nurses, intensivists and respiratory therapists to treat patients with state-of-the-art equipment and procedures. "At first, any patient who needed COVID care came to Winchester. But out of necessity, we expanded inpatient COVID care to all six hospitals in our system," Dr. Restrepo says.
- **Intensive medical monitoring for COVID:** Valley Health has a critical care team available 24/7 to assist with COVID care, and three pulmonary

critical care doctors were designated as "COVID resource physicians" to monitor the health status of all patients. "If someone shows any signs of a change, we can act very quickly," says pulmonologist T. Glen Boudier, MD, medical director of critical care at Winchester Medical Center.

- **Vital signs of COVID patients are electronically monitored around the clock using the FRANK Score:** Valley Health uses an in-house algorithm called the "FRANK Score" to spot small health shifts that indicate a patient with COVID needs more intensive care. The FRANK Score was developed by Valley Health physician Frank Lewis, MD, a specialist in internal and pulmonary medicine, during the early months of the pandemic. "I looked at our first 100 COVID patients to identify markers of worsening COVID," he explains. Dr. Restrepo and Dr. Boudier credit Dr. Lewis' innovative scoring system with Valley Health's low COVID mortality rate.
- **Upgraded hospital labs for fast COVID test results:** "We built up our testing capacity with more equipment and staff so that we could quickly receive COVID test results," Dr. Restrepo says. The in-hospital lab delivers test results in a day, compared to several days or up to a week for outside labs, especially early in the pandemic. "Many benefit from this fast turnaround time," Dr. Restrepo adds. "The COVID lab staff are among the unsung heroes of our pandemic response, processing 500 to 600 tests a day." The lab also processes COVID tests from community first responders and local skilled nursing facilities.
- **A behind-the-scenes COVID science-information team:** Researchers around the world continue to publish thousands of scientific papers that provide vital knowledge about this never-before-seen virus. To help make use of this ever-changing information, a literature review team composed of VHS physicians read and summarized new research for the medical staff.
- **A reliable supply of PPE:** Valley Health's Materials Management team worked through supply challenges like the national shortage of protective equipment. From masks and gowns to gloves and shields, VHS staff could rely on receiving the personal protective

# COVID-19: ONE YEAR LATER



## VHS LEADERS HONORED FOR EXCELLENCE

Valley Health and the Virginia and West Virginia health departments have partnered on numerous initiatives, collaborating to test and treat COVID patients, prevent the spread of the disease, vaccinate tens of thousands, and educate the public about best practices in health and safety. In March, Valley Health leaders, along with Colin Greene, MD (pictured second from left), of the Virginia Department of Health, were recognized with Top of Virginia Regional Chamber of Commerce's Greater Good Circle of Excellence Awards.

"For Valley Health, the response process began with setting up a team to oversee the work during the crisis, and Chief Physician Executive Iyad Sabbagh, MD (far right), led the command structure, recognizing early that a response team led by clinicians would be most effective and successful," notes VHS colleague Nicolas C. Restrepo, MD (second from right). Rounding out the group of awardees was Jeffrey Feit, MD (far left), honored for leading Valley Health's community outreach initiatives, and VHS President and CEO Mark Nantz (center), who represented Valley Health's thousands of "healthcare heroes." We congratulate and thank this dedicated group, whose commitment, innovation and collaboration, which was featured in national media such as *PBS NewsHour* and NBC News, brought hope and comfort to thousands, and most importantly, saved lives.

equipment needed to care for patients safely. "We were able to build up a reserve in case the supply chain was really strained," Dr. Restrepo says, an improvement that will pay dividends in cases of future high-contagion outbreaks.

## VALLEY HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY

"Early in the pandemic, VHS leaders understood the importance of connecting closely with the community," Dr. Feit says. Valley Health launched multimedia campaigns promoting the health benefits of social distancing, wearing masks and vaccination. Our team also took these important steps:

- **Weekly Zoom meetings with community leaders:** Dr. Feit, in partnership with Colin M. Greene, MD, director of the Lord Fairfax Health District, Virginia Department of Health, led regular Zoom calls with leaders from local schools; nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities; government; non-profit groups; and organizations that have group housing facilities, such as colleges and farms with worker dormitories. "Helping community leaders understand the issues so they could make decisions for their own organizations is very important to us," Dr. Feit says. "We want to be a source of truth. I can't overstate the importance that these relationships will have for future collaboration around other health challenges."
- **A COVID hotline, testing options and respiratory care centers open to the whole community:** As soon as signs of the pandemic reached the region, VHS set up the Valley Health Respiratory Care Phone Line. Anyone—not just Valley Health patients—could call to discuss their symptoms and, if needed, get referred for testing at our drive-through test sites, VHS Urgent Care centers or our primary care practices. Valley Health opened four Respiratory Care Clinics (in Martinsburg, WV, and Winchester, Front Royal and Mt. Jackson, VA) to serve people with respiratory symptoms in the early months of the pandemic. Clinic providers conducted thorough evaluations, and patients with suspected coronavirus were referred for further testing, home quarantine or hospital admission.

- **Comprehensive support for local nursing homes:**

The frailest and most elderly in our community are severely impacted by COVID, and Dr. Feit notes that many more of those in local nursing homes would have died if not for the heroic work of Valley Health staff. As residents and staff in those facilities became infected, our team stepped in to serve as caregivers in multiple roles. “Their actions saved many lives,” he adds.

- **Telehealth:** Shortly after the pandemic began, Valley Health launched a new telehealth platform across more than 50 Urgent Care, family medicine and specialty practices, allowing patients to “see” providers from the comfort, convenience and safety of home. Ongoing use of remote care platforms ensures care for those who continue to distance and quarantine, and may expand as a post-pandemic option for the homebound or others with transportation challenges.

- **The COVID vaccine:** Since December, more than 100,000 doses of the COVID vaccine have been administered to eligible people at four sites run jointly by the Lord Fairfax Health District, VHS and community organizations. Hundreds of volunteers have made this effort possible at sites located in Front Royal, Luray and Woodstock, and the largest operation at Shenandoah University in Winchester. (Note: The West Virginia Health Department launched vaccination clinics in partnership with local pharmacies, and numerous Valley Health staff have volunteered to assist with inoculations at these locales.) “The vaccine isn’t limited to Valley Health patients at these sites,” says Dr. Feit. “When you are eligible, you can receive it. The vaccine is a public good. It’s for everyone. We set up these sites because smart, committed people wanted to serve their community by improving health. That’s our mission, and it’s our community’s mission, too.”

→ Visit [valleyhealthlink.com/covid](https://valleyhealthlink.com/covid) for current information on our pandemic response.



Valley Health team members were on the front lines of COVID response, donning PPE to care for patients, filling syringes with vaccine and inoculating tens of thousands of area residents.



# SPOTLIGHT

## ADVANCES IN TREATING ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

Using the latest technologies, Valley Health's experts offer holistic care for this common cardiac condition

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is a common heart rhythm disorder that affects 20 million to 25 million Americans—but did you know that it's a major brain threat?

AFib increases odds for an ischemic stroke, the type caused by a blood clot, by 500 percent, according to Daniel Alexander, DO, a cardiologist and electrophysiologist with Winchester Cardiology and Vascular Medicine | Valley Health. "Ninety percent of clots that lead to a stroke in AFib form in a small pocket near the top of the heart called the left atrial appendage," Dr. Alexander explains. "If you're at risk for a stroke due to AFib, preventing clots from forming and leaving the heart is a top priority."

At Valley Health, experts who specialize in heart rhythm disorders offer a holistic, individually tailored approach to AFib care. Here's what to know about this condition and how it's treated and managed at Valley Health.

### INSIDE A QUIVERING HEART

In AFib, electrical signals that control heartbeats become fast and chaotic. The two upper chambers of the heart quiver instead of squeezing in a regular, coordinated way to pump blood into the lower chambers of the heart. As a result, blood can pool and clot—especially in the left atrial appendage, or LAA, which is a tiny, thumb-shaped pouch in the upper heart. If a clot from the LAA travels to the brain, it can block a blood vessel and cause a stroke.

"Risks for AFib include increasing age, hypertension, diabetes, coronary artery disease, peripheral artery disease, heart failure, and obstructive sleep apnea," Dr. Alexander says. "Researchers are also finding that alcohol use is another factor. Having more than two drinks per day can increase AFib risk by 7 percent per year." These factors can damage the heart or cause abnormalities.

Symptoms of AFib include a racing heart rate or irregular pulse, says Valley Health cardiologist Jeffrey Skiles, MD, also of Winchester Cardiology and Vascular Medicine, whose specialties include noninvasive cardiac imaging. "Others may feel breathlessness, chest discomfort, or even energy



loss and fatigue. But some patients with atrial fibrillation have no symptoms at all."

### A STEADIER BEAT AND LOWER STROKE RISK

Your primary care doctor or cardiologist may refer you to a heart rhythm specialist due to symptoms, findings when your doctor checks your heart or because of a test that uncovers signs of AFib.

At Valley Health, "the first thing we do is evaluate risk for stroke with AFib," says Zachary Hollis, MD, a cardiologist and electrophysiologist with Winchester Cardiology and Vascular Medicine. "Then we evaluate how to best improve quality of life by reducing the symptoms and



Members of Valley Health's clinical team who care for patients with atrial fibrillation and other heart rhythm disorders.



“The first thing we do is evaluate risk for stroke with AFib. Then we evaluate how to best improve quality of life by reducing the symptoms and burden of this condition.” —ZACHARY HOLLIS, MD

burden of this condition.” Physicians work with each patient on a personalized treatment plan that may include medications or a procedure called cardiac ablation to control heart rhythms. Other key considerations to promote heart health and discourage AFib episodes include a healthy lifestyle and attention to risks like high blood pressure and sleep apnea.

Meanwhile, blood-thinning medications can significantly reduce risk for an AFib-related stroke. These include warfarin as well as newer drugs that need less monitoring and dose adjustments such as apixaban (Eliquis), rivaroxaban (Xarelto) and dabigatran (Pradaxa). If you're among the many people with AFib who cannot take a blood thinner due to kidney disease, interactions with other medications, or a high risk of bleeding due to your age or a profession, a device called the Watchman FLX, inserted in the heart via a minimally invasive endovascular procedure, is an alternative that also protects against AFib-related stroke.

“The Watchman looks like a little umbrella without a handle,” explains Valley Health cardiologist Saif Al-Najafi, MD, also with Winchester Cardiology and Vascular Medicine, whose expertise in advanced cardiac imaging is used before and during the minimally invasive procedure that attaches the device to the LAA. “All the tools to perform the procedure and the Watchman FLX device are inserted through a small incision in the femoral vein of the leg and threaded up to the heart,” Dr. Al-Najafi says. After the procedure and an overnight hospital stay, patients can return home; during the following weeks and months, heart tissue grows around the device, securing it in place and blocking the opening of the LAA so clots cannot escape into circulation. If the Watchman is not an option, heart surgeons can close off the LAA with a hairpin-like device called the AtriClip.

Individualized treatment for AFib patients results in better quality of life, improved overall heart health and freedom from worry about AFib-caused stroke, though “you still have to control other stroke risks, like high blood pressure and being overweight,” Dr. Alexander notes. The result? “People often discover they had been ‘living down’ to AFib, experiencing symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath and weakness that make everyday activities difficult,” Dr. Hollis adds. “I’ve had patients tell me ‘I didn’t realize how much AFib impacted how badly I felt.’ With our holistic approach, significant improvement is possible.”

→ Visit [valleyhealthlink.com/heart](https://valleyhealthlink.com/heart) for more information on Valley Health's comprehensive heart and vascular care services.

## VACATION WELLNESS

With COVID-19 vaccinations rolling out, there are better days ahead for travel. Follow these tips to stay healthy.

While some restrictions have been lifted, experts still advise caution when traveling. Here's what you need to know before you go:

- **Get vaccinated for COVID-19 and don't embark on your travels until two weeks after receiving your final dose of the vaccine.**
- **Haven't been vaccinated? Get a viral test between one and three days before you depart. If you test positive, don't travel. If you test negative, keep your test results with you while traveling.**
- **Find out about any travel restrictions at your destination. The CDC's website provides a handy tool.**
- **Pack plenty of masks and hand sanitizer in your luggage.**
- **Always wear a mask in public. Masks are required in airports and on planes, trains and buses.**
- **Avoid crowds and keep your distance from others. Stay at least six feet away from people who aren't traveling with you.**

Depending on your plans, experts suggest some additional guidelines. Keep the following advice in mind for a worry-free vacation.

### IN THE MOUNTAINS

- **Take it slow.** If your destination is 9,000 feet above sea level or more, avoid traveling to that elevation in a single day. Ascend gradually and steer clear of alcohol for the first two days.
- **Hike right.** Stay hydrated and wear well-fitting footwear with ankle support.
- **Save your skin.** The sun's UV radiation is especially intense at high altitudes. Use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or more.

### AT THE BEACH

- **Swim smart.** Swim in designated places with a lifeguard on duty, who can warn about dangers like jellyfish or rip currents.
- **Watch your kids.** Keep children who are poor swimmers within arm's reach. Bear in mind that water wings and floaties weren't designed as safety flotation devices.
- **Stay sun safe.** Apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen every two hours. To prevent heatstroke, drink lots of fluids, avoiding alcohol and sugary drinks.

### EXPLORING THE COUNTRYSIDE

- **Travel with a buddy.** If you are heading into a remote area and someone gets hurt, the other person can go find help.
  - **Keep ticks at bay.** The number of cases of Lyme disease has doubled since 1991, and rural areas are prime tick habitats. Use an EPA-registered insect repellent and spray your clothing.
  - **Stop before sundown.** Make camp before dark. Those who continue hiking in the dark are at greater risk of falling and other accidents.
- Wherever you go, make sure you have enough prescription medications to last your trip. Taking a few precautions can help you stay healthy as you embark on your well-earned adventure!





## ANSWERING THE CALL FOR THOSE IN CRISIS

### VALLEY HEALTH IS A LONGTIME SUPPORTER OF CONCERN HOTLINE'S LIFESAVING MISSION

Valley Health and Concern Hotline have one priority in common: saving lives. In fact, when it comes to serving those in crisis in our community, both offer resources 24/7.

“Concern Hotline serves as a connection to life and a connection to community by offering information and referral services to those in crisis,” says Rusty Holland, executive director. “I’d say we’ve answered close to a million phone calls since the first one in 1969.”

Founded by those concerned about the high suicide rate in our region, Concern Hotline is one of a group of local

organizations that offer mental health resources to those in crisis. Because of the lifesaving work of its volunteers, Valley Health has supported the organization with grant funding for many years.

Recently, the volunteers at Concern Hotline have witnessed an uptick in the number of calls due to multiple stressors related to COVID-19. Holland says his team helps callers in crisis develop a safety plan that may include outreach to Valley Health Behavioral Health Services or other local resources.

Of course, key to being accessible to those in crisis are phone lines that function 24 hours a day.

“Grant funding keeps the phones ringing,” states Holland. “The money that we get from Valley Health helps pay our monthly phone bill, as well as funding training for our compassionate listeners.” Concern Hotline has around 40 volunteer listeners ready to take a range of calls. Some callers are contemplating suicide, while others are going through a life crisis and need someone to talk with.

“We call ourselves compassionate listeners because we offer a connection to another human being. We’ve trained our listeners specifically in the skills of our original mission: suicide prevention and intervention. For the past 50 years, our compassionate listeners have given their time freely to be there for hundreds of thousands of people.”

Holland says his team has looked for new ways to encourage one another—and raise funds—despite the additional pressures from the pandemic. He welcomes inquiries from those willing to support the hotline, as well as from those with a caring spirit and good listening skills interested in volunteering.

“Valley Health is honored to partner with Concern Hotline,” adds Valley Health President and CEO Mark Nantz. “Its impact on those feeling desperate and isolated is immeasurable. Their volunteers provide hope that comes with making a human connection.”

→ For information on Concern Hotline’s crisis services, visit [concernhotline.org](https://concernhotline.org). Visit [valleyhealthlink.com/communitybenefit](https://valleyhealthlink.com/communitybenefit) to learn more about Valley Health’s community partnerships.



Healthier, together.

Valley Health System  
P.O. Box 3340  
Winchester, VA 22604

Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 333  
Winchester, VA

Follow us:



Access your personal health information and communicate with members of your Valley Health healthcare team online.

## MyChart

- Manage appointments.
- Schedule automated reminders for important screenings like mammograms and blood pressure checks.
- Access new test results quickly.
- Request prescription renewals.
- Read provider notes about your care.

### And much more!

At home, at work, or on the road, you can securely and conveniently use the Internet to help manage and receive information about your health. And it's free, easy, and secure. *(Some limitations apply.)*

Visit [valleyhealthlink.com/mychart](http://valleyhealthlink.com/mychart) or call 888-730-4812 to activate your personalized account.

