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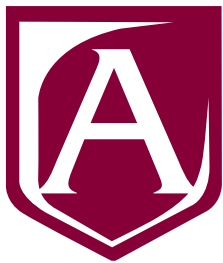
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Primary Care

Dr. Maria Lofstead: Practicing Medicine with People in Mind

By Andrew Wilson

The common advice dispensed to college students interested in medical school is to come up with a different answer than “I want to help people” for the interview question, “Why do you want to go to medical school?”

While she understands the wisdom at the root of that advice is to encourage students to distinguish themselves from the crowd, Maria Lofstead, D.O., a primary care physician (PCP) with St. Clair Medical Group and a self-described “people person,” doesn’t see a problem with that answer.

“I enjoy people. I enjoy the idea of helping people,” she said. “There are a lot of other things that you could do besides being a doctor, so if you don’t want to help people, you’re in the wrong profession.”

That’s a philosophy that she carries into her practice every day, seeking to build a relationship with her patients.

“That interpersonal connection is just so important,” she said. “It’s important to build trust with your patients and that starts by getting to know them.”

For new patients, Dr. Lofstead says the first visit will usually last about an hour, although that might be a little shorter for a younger, healthier person.

“I’m a detail-oriented person, and I want to know their medical history, their family history, and whether they are up to date on their screening and vaccines,” she said. “I generally like to lay a good foundation on that first visit.”

Following that first visit, Dr. Lofstead recommends an annual exam with young, healthy patients, but older patients or patients with chronic conditions may need to be seen more frequently.

“It’s really helpful for me to stay up to date on things,” she said, describing it as a “360-degree view” of a patient’s health. “If I stay up to date, I have a more complete view of their health.”

Establishing that foundation during a wellness visit can be critical in deciding what to do when the patient calls because they are feeling unwell. Everyone experiences aches and pains from time to time, but deciding whether it is serious enough to bother a doctor is often a tough decision. Dr. Lofstead can make that decision easier.

“A lot of people will say, ‘Oh, it’s probably nothing, and if it is nothing, that’s great,’” she said. “But if it isn’t ... well, there are weird things that happen in life. If you are experiencing something outside your normal, come in. There’s never a downside. Even if it ends up being nothing, I like to reinforce to patients that I’m glad they came in.”

As an internist, staying up to date on her patients’ health is also important for her role as a “preventionist,” a term she may have coined. Simply put, a preventionist seeks to keep her patients well by making sure they are doing the things they need to do to head off illness.

“If I can help patients from having a heart attack or developing diabetes or some other chronic condition, that’s what I try to do,”

Medical Profiles



“I encourage them to ask questions. People like to know the ‘why’ behind a preventive health change. I enjoy giving them the rationale and reason behind it so they can understand why I am making this recommendation for them.”

*Maria Lofstead, D.O.,
St. Clair Medical Group*

she said. “I let my patients know what they should do to have good health, but I try to give them options.”

By options, she means that not everyone is ready to change their lifestyle immediately, which she understands. Still, Dr. Lofstead encourages them to make small changes that will begin to affect their overall health positively.

“It’s important for me to meet my patients where they are,” she said. “My role as a PCP is to figure out the next best steps for my patients.”

She believes every doctor begins their career planning to change the world, and she was no exception. She has come to discover that the best way to change the world is one patient at a time, which is why she wants patients to engage with her and ask questions about treatment options.

“I encourage them to ask questions. People like to know the ‘why’ behind a preventive health change,” she said. “I enjoy giving them the rationale and reason behind it so they can understand why I am making this recommendation for them.”

One advantage she believes she has is working at a health system like St. Clair Health.

“I have a passion for community medicine,” Dr. Lofstead said. “I did my residency in a community hospital that was very much like St. Clair. It’s so much easier to make the personal connections that can improve patients’ health.”

Spoken like a true people person.

Dr. Maria Lofstead practices with **St. Clair Medical Group Internal Medicine**. She earned her medical degree from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed her residency at Reedsville Hospital and Medical Center. She sees patients at the following **St. Clair Health** locations:

Robinson Township Multispecialty Suite

1 Robinson Plaza, Suite 410
Pittsburgh, PA 15205
(412) 942-6755

Professional Office Building

1050 Bower Hill Road, Suite 101
Pittsburgh, PA 15243
(412) 343-1770

Are you at risk of getting Hepatitis?

By Lois Thomson

Hepatitis is a disease of the liver caused by a virus, and the five kinds are simply known as A, B, C, D, and E.

Hepatitis A usually goes away on its own with no serious problems. Hepatitis B is highly preventable, and about 95 percent of adults who are exposed can completely recover within 6 months without medication. Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver failure and end-stage liver disease, and is a major cause of liver transplants in the United States. Hepatitis D occurs only among people who are infected with the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis E is mainly found in Africa, Asia and South America.

Hepatitis A, B, and C are contagious, but each one is spread differently. Type A will most likely come from contaminated food or water, or from close contact with a person or object that's infected.

The virus is found in blood and certain body fluids, and hepatitis B is spread when a person comes in contact with blood or body fluid from an infected person. This can happen by having sex with someone who is infected; sharing needles or other equipment when using drugs or if getting

tattoos; or even from an infected mother giving birth to her baby. Hepatitis C is spread in similar ways, but getting it from sex isn't as common.



Symptoms

Symptoms of hepatitis include sudden nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea; pain or bloating in the stomach area; dark urine or gray-colored stool; unusual tiredness or weakness; low-grade fever; intense itching; loss of appetite; jaundice; low-grade fever; joint pain; or weight loss.

Prevent infection

To prevent infection, those who have not been previously vaccinated should be vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B. There are no vaccines against hepatitis C, D and E, and there are no cures for hepatitis once it happens. Most cases of acute hepatitis will resolve themselves over time. If a person contracts the virus, medicines are available that can help fight it and slow its ability to damage the liver. Treatment focuses on preventing further damage, possibly reversing existing damage, and relieving symptoms.

Get Vaccinated For Hepatitis!

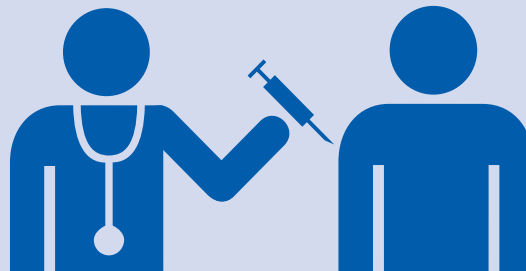
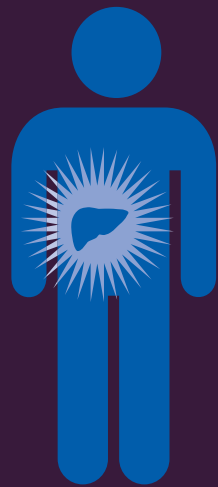
Hepatitis A & B cases are rising in Allegheny County.

The best way to prevent hepatitis A and B is to get vaccinated.

All adults ages 19-59 should be vaccinated against hepatitis B. All children less than 19 years of age should be vaccinated. While there is no vaccine for hepatitis C, it's important that people living with the infection get vaccinated for hepatitis A & B to protect their liver.

To learn more about hepatitis, visit: www.cdc.gov/Hepatitis

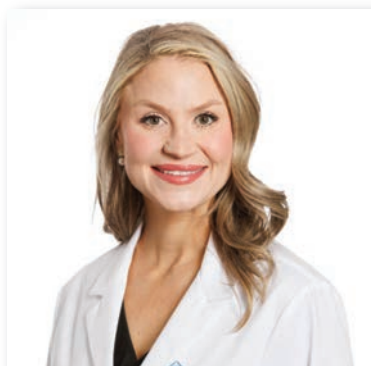
Make a hepatitis vaccine appointment at the Allegheny County Health Department
Immunizations Clinic at 412-578-8062.



Dr. McQuillen Says Endometriosis Can Be Debilitating, But There Are Options Available

By Andrew Wilson

For Kourtnie McQuillen, M.D., of St. Clair Medical Group OB/GYN, the best part of her job is when she can bring relief to a woman who is experiencing very painful menstrual cycles due to endometriosis.



“Many women have a misconception that having painful periods is normal. What’s not normal is having to miss school or work because of it.”

*Dr. Kourtnie McQuillen, OB/GYN
St. Clair Medical Group*

“We don’t have to live with pain,” said Dr. McQuillen. “There are options we have available to improve the situation.”

Excessively painful periods may be a sign of endometriosis, a condition where tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside of the uterus. The endometriosis tissue acts just as the tissue growing inside the uterus does. It thickens, breaks down and bleeds, but unlike the tissue growing inside the uterus, endometrial tissue doesn’t leave the body.

This causes inflammation which can lead to scar tissue formation among surrounding organs. This scar tissue causes surrounding organs to stick to the uterus, hampering the proper functioning of both the uterus and affected organs. The pain can be so great that women with endometriosis find it impossible to function for a couple days during their period and need to miss school or work.

“Many women have a misconception that having painful periods is normal,” said Dr. McQuillen, an OB/GYN specialist with expertise in minimally invasive surgery and robotic surgery. “What’s not normal is having to miss school or work because of it.”

There are both medical and surgical options to treat endometriosis. Medical options include prescribing birth control pills or giving a medication to simulate a medical menopause. Dr. McQuillen says that while this may bring relief, it may not be the final answer.

“With minimally invasive surgery, we can excise the lesions of endometriosis, as well as removing scar tissue and any adhesions that occur,” she said. “By removing the scar tissue, we are able to restore normal anatomy and functioning of any affected organs.”

In the cases when the bowels are affected, Dr. McQuillen says she will work in concert with a colorectal surgeon, but most often is able to surgically treat the endometrial tissue by herself.

One memorable case for Dr. McQuillen was when she treated a 15-year-old for endometriosis that had affected her digestive tract. Before being diagnosed with endometriosis, the teen and her mother had consulted with several gastrointestinal specialists, but

no treatment had brought relief from the intense pain that was seriously limiting her life. Dr. McQuillen diagnosed her and performed surgery, which returned her to normal functioning.

“Afterwards, her mother was crying thanking me for restoring her teenager’s life to her,” she said. “Those are the moments that make it totally worthwhile, when you can improve someone’s life to such an extent.”

Unfortunately, Dr. McQuillen cautions that endometriosis can be chronic in nature, so it may return. However, once it is diagnosed the first time, both patients and doctors are alert for the signs that can signal a return.

The symptoms of endometriosis include the following:

- Painful periods
- Excessive bleeding
- Pain with bowel movements or voiding
- Painful intercourse
- Bloating sensation that may occur all the time, not just during menstrual flow.

“This is a disease that can be really, really debilitating,” Dr. McQuillen said. “Women who have these symptoms need to know that there are options available. We don’t have to live in constant pain.”

Dr. Kourtnie McQuillen earned her medical degree from Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine and completed her residency training at West Virginia University. She’s an advocate for women at every stage of their lives and takes special pride in being a part of a woman’s journey. She sees patients at the following **St. Clair Health** locations:

Robinson Township Multispecialty Suite

1 Robinson Plaza, Suite 410
Pittsburgh, PA 15205
(412) 788-1330

Professional Office Building

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Mt. Lebanon, PA 15243
(412) 942-1066

Village Square Outpatient Center

2000 Oxford Drive, Suite 415
Bethel Park, PA 15102
(412) 942-5380

A Call to Gateway Rehab is the First Step to Treatment and Recovery



By Nancy Kennedy

At Gateway Rehab Center, persons who have made the brave decision to begin recovery from substance use disorder will find a warm welcome. “Welcome” is more than a word of greeting at Gateway; it’s a philosophy that permeates the facility, inviting, embracing and encouraging people to take the first step of a journey to recovery and restored life.

The process of assessment and admission to Gateway’s inpatient and outpatient programs is notably simple and streamlined, easing the experience as much as possible. Abby Jolley, MS, Director of Evaluation Services at Gateway, explains that this is purposeful. “If a patient has made the choice to call, we have a team of clinicians who are ready to facilitate an admission. For an inpatient admission, if a bed is available, an admission can be scheduled fairly quickly, sometimes within one hour.”

Gateway will take calls for evaluation and possible admission at anytime, 24/7, 365, even on Christmas. “We are always here,” Jolley says. “You can call in the middle of the night, and a clinician will answer.” At the initial call, the Scheduling Department will do a brief screening and ask questions to determine why you are calling. They gather the information and direct your call to inpatient or outpatient evaluation. The staff members who take this first call are very compassionate and professional; they understand that making this call is the first step.

“The staff are friendly and they will try to make you comfortable. If you have questions about admission or treatment in general, you can ask. Making the call to Gateway does not mean that you are



obligated to sign up for treatment. You are simply learning your options. We are also happy to talk to family members and educate them about treatment and how to help their loved ones get into treatment.”

“For inpatient admissions, we can do an assessment over the phone. For outpatients, we offer both telehealth and in-person appointments.”

The first step for an admission to treatment, Jolley says, is gathering information. “For all patients, we use ASAM criteria. We complete a biopsychosocial assessment that gathers information regarding substance abuse, mental health and medical history. Additionally, we ask about current living situation, daily environment, previous treatment, legal history, and motivation for treatment.”

“Our clinicians have a variety of professional backgrounds. Most have master’s degrees and many are licensed therapists. Our team is outstanding: well qualified, highly skilled and passionate about the work they do. They are strong advocates for the patients. It’s not a stress-free job but it’s a highly satisfying one; every day, we work with people who are in crisis, under the influence or even suicidal. They need our expert help. We are here because we believe in the capacity of people to recover and restore their lives, with the right support and individualized treatment. It can be hard to take this first step of calling, and we understand that.”

Admission to Gateway is a streamlined and efficient process that offers immediate support and hope. The assessment is the first step of a journey. Recovery works.



“We are here because we believe in the capacity of people to recover and restore their lives, with the right support and individualized treatment.”

*Abby Jolley, MS,
Director of Evaluation Services, Gateway*

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Finding Balance: Treating Dizziness with Physical Therapy

Dizziness can be a debilitating condition that affects people of all ages. Whether it's a sensation of spinning, unsteadiness, or lightheadedness, dizziness can significantly impact a person's quality of life. Fortunately, physical therapy offers a variety of effective treatments to address dizziness and help individuals regain their balance and confidence.

Before we delve into the treatments, it's essential to understand the common causes of dizziness. Dizziness can be attributed to various factors, including inner ear problems, vestibular disorders, orthopedic issues, and neurological conditions. Physical therapists play a crucial role in assessing the root cause and tailoring treatment plans accordingly.

1. Vestibular Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT)

For many individuals suffering from dizziness, Vestibular Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) is the primary treatment approach. The vestibular system, located in the inner ear, helps maintain balance and spatial orientation. VRT consists of exercises and maneuvers designed to strengthen the vestibular system and improve its function. These exercises may include head and eye movements, balance training, and habituation exercises.

2. Canalith Repositioning Maneuvers

If the dizziness is due to benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), a common inner ear problem, physical therapists can perform Canalith Repositioning Maneuvers. These maneuvers involve carefully moving the head and body to reposition displaced calcium crystals in the inner ear, alleviating symptoms of vertigo.

3. Gaze Stabilization Exercises

Dizziness often leads to difficulties with eye coordination, making it challenging to focus on objects or maintain visual stability. Gaze stabilization exercises are designed to improve eye movement control and help individuals maintain a steady gaze even when the head is in motion.

4. Balance Training

Loss of balance is a common complaint among those experiencing dizziness. Physical therapists develop personalized balance training programs to address this issue. These programs typically include exercises that challenge stability, such as standing on one leg, walking on uneven surfaces, and performing various balance drills.



5. Strength and Conditioning

Sometimes, dizziness can result from musculoskeletal weaknesses or poor conditioning. Physical therapists may incorporate strengthening exercises to improve overall physical fitness, enhancing an individual's ability to maintain balance and reduce dizziness.

Educating patients about their condition is an integral part of physical therapy. Therapists provide guidance on lifestyle modifications, fall prevention strategies, and techniques to cope with dizziness in daily life. Empowering patients with knowledge is essential for long-term management.

It's important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to treating dizziness with physical therapy. Each individual's symptoms and underlying causes are

unique. Therefore, physical therapists create customized treatment plans tailored to the patient's specific needs, addressing their unique challenges and goals.

Dizziness can be a formidable obstacle, but it doesn't have to control your life. The journey to overcoming dizziness through physical therapy requires commitment and patience. Progress may be gradual, but with consistency and guidance from a skilled physical therapist, significant improvements are achievable. It's important to follow the prescribed exercises and attend therapy sessions regularly.

> If you or someone you know is struggling with dizziness, consider consulting with **FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Centers** for a physical therapist experienced in vestibular rehabilitation. With the right guidance and dedication, you can find your equilibrium and step back into a world of stability and confidence.

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(412) 457-8200
www.fyzical.com/monroeville-pa

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(412) 785-0111
www.fyzical.com/bridgeville-pa

WHS' Children's Therapy Center Offers Hope to Families of Children with ASD

By Andrew Wilson

When your child has been diagnosed with or exhibits signs of autism spectrum disorder, it may be difficult to know where to turn for help. The Washington Health System (WHS) Children's Therapy Center offers hope to both children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and their parents.

The National Institute of Mental Health defines autism spectrum disorder as a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), people with autism often have difficulty with communication and interaction with other people, restricted interests and repetitive behaviors, and symptoms that affect their ability to function in school, work, and other areas of life.

"Some communication issues that a child diagnosed with autism might have include difficulty understanding and using language effectively," said Julie Legters, the speech therapy coordinator at WHS' Children's Therapy Center. "This can include issues with paying attention, following directions, understanding expectations, and displaying or reading socially expected emotions/facial expressions."

This doesn't mean that children with autism can't learn. Legters said that some of the children she has seen have incredible knowledge of certain subjects or hobbies, like trains, and others have organizational abilities that they are compelled to follow.

"In my decades of experience as a speech/language pathologist, I have learned to incorporate these creative behaviors into my therapy sessions in order to meet the child where he or she is," she said. "There is a vast spectrum associated with the diagnosis of autism. As more research has been completed, we have seen that many of these children have used their different way of thinking to solve problems, to create incredible strategies, and to form new patterns of procedures."

She said there are numerous ways to help a child with autism communicate effectively. If speech is too difficult or not possible, some children may be able to use sign language and gestures to indicate what he/she wants. Pictures can be used to help the child point to what is needed, or there are speech-generating devices that use pictures and words to allow the child to be more independent.

"Some families start with working on 'yes/no' and ask questions to determine what the child is trying to say," Legters said. "Some children are verbal, some are verbal with difficulty conveying thoughts and feelings effectively, and some are non-verbal and rely on augmented ways to communicate."

In addition to working with the children, the WHS Children's Therapy Center can provide parents with strategies or methods to



help supplement the therapy provided and improve communication at home and in the community.

"Some children will receive work to practice at home, such as worksheets to produce sounds or the speech/language pathologist (SLP) will provide a model or demonstration of how to build communication via vocabulary, following directions, pronoun use, or language structures and ask the family to play with the child in that way during the interval between sessions," Legters said. "Parents are encouraged to ask questions and are given full support through our entire approach."

Legters also cautions parents that just because a child may have difficulty with speech or learning to communicate, it doesn't always indicate autism.

"Many children have difficulty learning the rules of grammar, the use of pronouns, verb tenses, and other speech and language issues that continue to develop as a child learns and uses words," she said. "That does not mean the child is presenting with autism."

The best approach for a parent with concerns about their children is to ask questions and seek help early.

"The earlier the intervention, the greater the impact," Legters said. "This is true of children with speech and language issues associated with autism and/or suspected autism. If speech and language is not developing in a typical manner, a child should be evaluated for the possibility of a disorder that can be improved upon and/or treated."

At WHS Children's Therapy Center, speech/language pathologists along with occupational and physical therapists are trained to provide assessment to any child with communication deficits. To begin therapy, parents complete a medical and family history for the child, and the child participates in a 1-on-1 evaluation process with a therapist. From there, selected tests are completed, results compiled, and a full communication evaluation report is created. This report often touches on receptive language, expressive lan-

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page



gauge, articulation, phonological processing, voice, fluency, motor programming, oral-motor structures and functions, hearing, eating and swallowing. A therapeutic speech related diagnosis is determined, and recommendations are based upon each individual child's needs.

"Most children receive services twice weekly for 30-minute sessions," Legters said. "We also see children once a week, monthly, and/or as needed. Most of our children are seen individually while others may be recommended for group therapy to improve social interaction with peers. These determinations are generated with the child in mind, while also collaborating with the families and other therapists to create the most effective treatment for the child's needs."

WHS' Children's Therapy Center, the largest and most comprehensive therapy program in Washington County, has two facilities (McMurray and Washington) to help make it easier for your child to receive therapy. They also utilize the therapeutic pool equipment at WHS Wilfred R. Cameron Wellness Center. The Center only treats pediatric patients age 0-18, so the equipment is geared for children and includes physical therapy gyms, private treatment rooms, sensory rooms and more. The Center treats a variety of children's issues, including autism spectrum disorder, developmental motor or speech delays, sensory processing disorders, cerebral palsy, attention deficit disorder, hearing loss, orthopedic injuries, and many others.



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Babies With Congenital Heart Defects Living Longer and Healthier



Congenital heart defects (CHDs) are the most common type of birth defect. They are present at birth and can affect the structure of a baby's heart – particularly how blood flows through the heart and out to the rest of the body. CHDs can range from mild (a small hole in the heart) to severe (missing or poorly formed parts of the heart).

About 1 in 4 babies born with a heart defect has a critical CHD and will need surgery or other procedures in the first year of life. Signs and symptoms depend on the type and severity of the defect. Some might not have any; others might have the following:

- Blue-tinted nails, lips, or skin
- Fast or troubled breathing
- Failure to develop normally
- Sleepiness
- Abnormal heart rhythms
- Swollen body tissue or organs

The causes of CHDs among most babies are unknown. Some have heart defects because of changes in their genes or chromosomes. CHDs also are thought to be caused by a combination of genes and other factors, such as things in the environment, or the mother's diet or health conditions. For example, certain conditions like pre-existing diabetes or obesity in the mother have been linked to heart defects in the baby. Smoking or taking certain medications during pregnancy have also been linked to defects.

Some CHDs may be diagnosed during pregnancy using a special type of ultrasound called a fetal echocardiogram, which creates ultrasound pictures of the baby's developing heart. However, some CHDs are not detected until after birth or later in life, during childhood or adulthood.

As medical care and treatment have advanced, babies with CHDs are living longer and healthier lives, although treatment depends on the type and severity of the defect. Some include medications to lower blood pressure and control the heart rate. In more serious cases, infants and children might need one or more surgeries to repair the heart or blood vessels.

Some can be treated without surgery using a procedure called cardiac catheterization. A long tube is guided through the blood vessels into the heart, where a doctor can take pictures, do tests, or repair the problem. Sometimes the heart defect can't be fully repaired, but these procedures can improve blood flow and the way the heart works. Serious cases may require a heart transplant.

Children's Health

Dried Fruit Healthy Option for Children's Lunches, Snacks

As the name implies, dried fruit is fruit that has almost all of its water content removed. Some are more nutritious than others – are good sources of fiber and potassium – but some also are known for being high in calories and sugar. If you choose the kinds that don't have any added sweeteners or oils, the right ones can be just as good for children as fresh. Some of the best ones to consider are raisins, apricots, prunes, figs, dates, berries, cherries, mango, cranberries, apple and pineapple rings, and banana chips.

Benefits include:

- They are high in fiber.
- They are a good source of antioxidants and nutrients.
- Because dried fruits contain less water, they are a more concentrated source of vitamins and minerals.
- Adding dried fruits like raisins or berries to cereal, granola, baked goods, yogurt, etc., can help decrease the need for additional sugar, therefore making the recipe healthier.
- With much of the water removed, dried fruit doesn't spoil easily, adding to its shelf life and making it a convenient snack for on the go.
- One-third of a cup of unsweetened dried fruit is approximately equal to one cup of fresh fruit, so it counts toward the recommended daily two to three servings of fruit.

Autism on the Rise

The number of cases of autism has been increasing at an almost alarming rate. Two 2023 studies by the CDC – one that focused on 4-year-olds and the other on 8-year-olds – reported that 1 out of 36 children has autism. This is a considerable jump from 1 in 44 in 2021, and much more so than 1 in 110 in 2006.

But the numbers may not be as alarming as they seem. Many believe that the increase can be attributed to the fact that autism has been there all the time, but physicians are just doing a better job of learning to recognize the signs. There is no simple test for autism, so accurate diagnosis requires special training. Some signs to look for in children include:

- Poor eye contact
- Does not respond to their name
- Can't start or continue a conversation
- Performs repetitive movements, such as rocking or spinning
- Develops specific routines or rituals and becomes disturbed if they are interrupted
- Performs activities that could cause self-harm, such as head-banging

While autism may be difficult to recognize, most children will begin to show signs before the age of 2. For that reason, it's important to observe your child and contact your doctor with any concerns.

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For Weight Loss, Put These in Your Grocery Shopping Cart



Trying to lose a few pounds? Here is your grocery list! These are foods that are basics for a healthy, lower calorie eating plan.

- Apples
- Asparagus, greens beans, broccoli – green vegetables
- Beans especially black and red ones
- Berries, all kinds
- Citrus fruits (not the juice)
- Cottage cheese (if you follow a low salt diet, try ricotta instead)
- Eggs
- Dark leafy greens – spinach, kale, arugula
- Greek yogurt
- Cucumbers
- Potatoes (yes!)

It's perfectly fine to purchase frozen fruits and vegetables. They are super-convenient, less work and you will have less food waste. Try substituting beans for meat in a soup or stew. Greek yogurt is high in protein, very filling and versatile – add fruit to it, use it in place of sour cream or add it to mayonnaise to lower the calories. Cucumbers are a great snack with almost zero calories – slice them in rounds and use them as “crackers” with a yogurt dip.

Just Tired – or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is considered to be a complicated disorder because the cause is unknown, and there's no one particular test to confirm a diagnosis.

CFS is characterized by extreme tiredness, yet an afternoon nap or an earlier bedtime won't change that. In addition to the fatigue, which lasts for at least six months, a wide range of other symptoms can include:

- Tender lymph nodes in the neck or armpits
- A sore throat that occurs repeatedly
- Digestive issues, like irritable bowel syndrome
- Chills and night sweats
- Allergies and sensitivities to foods, odors, chemicals, light, or noise
- Shortness of breath
- Irregular heartbeat
- Problems with memory or thinking skills
- Dizziness that worsens with



moving from lying down or sitting to standing positions

- Unrefreshing sleep

The cause is unknown, and might be triggered by a number of factors, such as:

- **Genetics** – CFS appears to run in some families
- **Infections** – Some people develop symptoms after getting better from a viral or bacterial infection
- **Physical or emotional trauma** – Some report that they experienced an injury, surgery, or significant emotional stress shortly before their symptoms began

Because of the range of symptoms, a variety of medical tests may be needed to rule out other health problems that have similar indicators. There is currently no cure for CFS, and treatment for the condition focuses on easing symptoms.

Coffee Break

Coffee Houses Have Been Around A Long Time!

By Lois Thomson

"Paris was coffee mad. The first coffee house had opened more than a hundred years before and now they were scattered across the city. Coffee houses were where Parisian husbands went to see their friends, conduct business, read the newspapers. At first wives complained about this new fad but after several years, it was clear no one would give up their coffee and by that time women were enjoying it as well, and began to serve it at home." (*Excerpt from "Death Du Jour," Lou Jane Temple*)

The popularity of coffee houses dates back nearly 500 years. The world's first known coffee houses opened in Constantinople – now Istanbul – Turkey, around 1550. Shortly thereafter, in the 17th century, coffee houses were introduced to Europe. The first coffee houses opened in Vienna in the early 1600s; the first one in London appeared in 1652; and the first one in Paris in 1672.

What contributed to the popularity? One main reason is that the water wasn't safe to drink. Cholera and other diseases were prev-

alent, and for health reasons, beer was the beverage of choice, starting with breakfast and continuing with lunch and during the rest of the day. But as heavy industry increased, beer didn't mix well with the industrial workplace, so coffee began to take its place.

As for the coffee houses themselves, once they arrived on the scene their growth was exponential. By 1700, there were more than 2000 in London alone. They became centers of intellectual discussions as men would gather and spend hours at a time engaging in conversations and listening to debates. Soon the coffee houses became known as penny universities, because you could buy a cup of coffee for a penny and participate in or just sit and absorb the exchanges.

Over time, each place became associated with a particular area of science or business – or even the arts – and you could go from place to place to hear thoughts about a certain topic. This gave growth to the idea of a newspaper that contained different sections to be shared with others – men would go into a café and take notes on the conversations to pass around to friends.

Living Well With A Disability

Voices for Independence Celebrates 30 Years

By Lois Thomson

Following years of renovation and capital funding, the new building housing Voices for Independence (VFI) in Washington, PA, opened in December; however, Nick Consoli believes the opening is only the beginning. Consoli is chief development officer of VFI, a center for independent living that provides resources and services to individuals with disabilities in the community, enabling them to live more independent-

ly. Washington's TRPIL (Transitional Paths to Independent Living) became affiliated with VFI in October 2019, and VFI is now celebrating 30 years of serving the community throughout 27 counties. During that time, the organization has been helping clients with everything from nursing home transitions to home modifications, from an assistive fitness center to an assistive technology department.

As someone who just joined the organization about the time of the new opening, Consoli admits he isn't too familiar with what took place in the past. However, while he agreed it's difficult to determine what will be accomplished in 2024, he said it will be "a celebration of what we've done in the past 30 years, and also being prepared for the next 30 years."

Educating people about VFI is one of Consoli's priorities. As he said, "I've been surprised in my first few months here how many conversations I've had with folks who said, 'I've heard of you guys, but what do you do?' So we are working to be able to educate people; we're looking for opportunities to sit down with them and say, 'This is what we do, this is what we can offer.'"

For that reason, the organization is looking for support during their ongoing 30th year celebration. However, Consoli clarified: "We're not just asking for funding for the sake of asking; we're asking so that we are able to offer more services in return. We can do a lot more, and that's going to be a focus of mine." He explained, for example, that while VFI may have been able to help 150 people, there are 300 more who need assistance, and to be able to do that requires additional funding.

Steve Johnson, director of marketing for VFI in both Washington and Erie, concurred. "The capital campaign for this

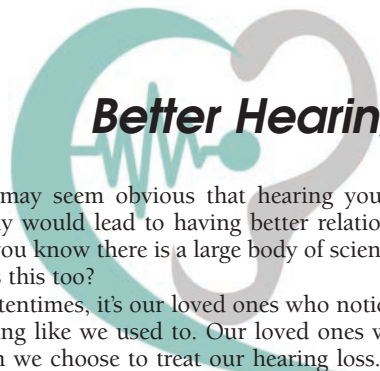


With VFI celebrating its 30th anniversary, Nick Consoli said Steve Johnson has some "really great ideas" for telling stories about the past three decades. "We're going to share success stories about many of the things that have occurred. We're going to sit down and calculate the number of people we've helped; so many members of our community have come through our doors or have been affected by our Nursing Home Transition or Home Modification programs. We're going to roll everything out shortly and it's going to be great to watch."

building is over; we're not looking to do more renovations, we're looking to serve more people in bigger and better ways. That's why it's so important that everyone knows what we do and why we do it. It's equally as important to know that while we're asking for donations and support, it's on behalf of those who still need our help."

Consoli concluded, "This is one of the best organizations for individuals with disabilities in all of Western Pennsylvania. While we are celebrating 30 incredible years of service to those in our community, we have just scratched the surface in regard to the number of people we can help."

> For more information, call (724) 223-5115 or visit www.vficil.org.



Better Hearing = Better Relationships

It may seem obvious that hearing your partner, friends and family would lead to having better relationships with them, but did you know there is a large body of scientific evidence that supports this too?

Oftentimes, it's our loved ones who notice we're having trouble hearing like we used to. Our loved ones will also benefit greatly when we choose to treat our hearing loss. If you can't hear your family like you used to, there's a good chance they aren't suddenly mumbling.

Here are some of the reasons why better hearing leads to better relationships:

Hearing better means less frustration

Not being able to hear other people leads to frustration – for you and for other people. At home, this frustration may lead to less communication, and then even more frustration! Wearing hearing aids can help bring back the day-to-day communication that strengthens relationships.

Hearing better means more communication

If you've been mishearing or totally missing the things your partner has been saying, they are likely not saying much at all anymore. When hearing loss is treated, everyday conversation can

Hearing Health



come back. From a quick "I love you" to jokes and plans, the more you communicate with loved ones, the better your relationship will be.

Treating hearing loss can help fight cognitive decline

When hearing loss is addressed and treated, the risk of developing cognitive decline may go down¹. Keep your brain active and live your life to the fullest by taking care of your hearing health.

Making an effort matters

When you decide to address your hearing loss, that effort matters to the people you love. Knowing that you care about yourself and your relationships enough to take care of your hearing and look for a solution is important.

If you've noticed that others are mumbling, or your spouse is frustrated by how loud the TV is, or you have found yourself avoiding restaurants because they are too loud – it's time for a hearing check. Schedule yours today at your local HearingLife – it's complimentary and our experienced, licensed professionals will help get you back to hearing the people you love.

1 G Livingston, Jonathan Huntley, Andrew Sommerlad, et al. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 report of the Lancet Commission. The Lancet. July 30, 2020



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Poor Dental Hygiene Can Result in Variety of Diseases

By Lois Thomson

Nobody likes to go to the dentist, but if you avoid it for too long, you may find you have more health problems than just a few cavities. Research has shown a number of health issues can be caused by poor oral hygiene, starting with bacteria that starts in the mouth and enters the bloodstream, which can lead to serious conditions.

Some of these include:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Alzheimer's
- Periodontal disease
- Diabetes
- High-risk pregnancy
- Cancer
- Obesity
- Obstructive sleep apnea

For example, in the case of cardiovascular disease, periodontal disease is directly linked to artery inflammation. Bacteria from the mouth enters the bloodstream, causing arteries to harden, which in turn increases a patient's risk for stroke or heart attack.

Or with Alzheimer's, bacteria leaving the mouth can travel to the brain, killing brain cells and leading to memory loss. Oral bacteria from poor dental hygiene have been linked to the development of Alzheimer's as well as dementia. Poor dental hygiene and its connections to a higher risk for respiratory issues can develop by bacteria in the mouth being inhaled into the lungs or traveling through the bloodstream. And so on.

The bottom line is that proper cleaning and regular dental checkups are a must for helping to lower your risk of more serious problems.

The Growing Problem of Obesity



By Lois Thomson

A study by the World Health Organization reveals that one billion people on Earth are obese, or, approximately one in eight. And that number has doubled among adults and quadrupled among 5- to 19-year-olds in the past three decades and continues to grow.

This shouldn't be a surprise because many people are leading more sedentary lifestyles and are disregarding healthy eating habits. People know what actions they should take but implementing them isn't easy. However, ignoring them for too long can be disastrous. Consider, for example, that obesity increases the risk of many diseases, including cardiovascular, type 2 diabetes, and respiratory disease. It is also considered to be a cause of more than a dozen different types of cancer.

While not easy, addressing the issue of obesity is critical. Steps you can take include:

- Developing healthier eating habits by stressing whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and limiting extra sugar and fats
 - Taking part in physical activities based on recommendations for your age
 - Making careful choices when eating out, particularly at public events such as fairs or festivals or sporting events
 - Making overall health and well-being a priority
- Starting with small steps in each category can help the undertaking be easier to begin and stick to.



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Ultra-Processed Foods Are Convenient and Tasty, but Overconsumption Can Lead to Adverse Health Outcomes

By Nancy Kennedy

A study recently published in the *British Medical Journal* links the consumption of ultra-processed foods to adverse health outcomes. Exposure to ultra-processed foods is associated with 32 health parameters, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, mental health and sleep disorders, the study reveals. Unfortunately, ultra-processed foods are ultra-popular and their consumption is growing. Their convenience, relative low cost, availability and taste appeal to all age groups, and they are aggressively marketed. In fact, 50 to 60% of the food consumed by Americans is ultra-processed food.

So what is ultra-processed food? Foods are classified into three categories, explains Melissa Accardi, MS, RD, LDN, Registered Dietitian and Nutritionist at the Wilfred R. Cameron Wellness Center at Washington Health System. “First there is food in its natural state, then processed food that has been physically or chemically altered from its natural state, and finally ultra-processed food, which is highly processed with additives, preservatives and chemicals to enhance flavor and extend shelf life. Ultra-processed foods are ready to eat, convenient, packaged food products such as salty snacks, frozen meals, crackers, cookies and fast food. They are typically high in sodium, fat and added sugar.”

To illustrate the differences between natural, processed and ultra-processed food, Accardi cites corn as an example: “An ear of fresh corn is a natural food; a can of corn is a processed food. A bag of corn chips is an ultra-processed food.”

Ultra-processed foods tend to be poor in nutritional value, and they often displace healthy food such as fruit and vegetables from the diet. But ultra-processed food should not be demonized, according to Accardi. “Ultra-processed food is still food so it will provide your body with fuel; however they are not the type of fuel that we want to include in our diets very often. We all need to pay attention to how much of our diet is made up of ultra-processed food. Since they are highly palatable and convenient, families and children may be eating too many unprocessed foods.”

Accardi says that parents need to introduce vegetables early, and offer whole fruit for snacks. “Frequent consumption of ultra-processed foods for children may not set them up well for their future health. When children are consuming a diet high in ultra-processed foods at an early age, they may have a greater tendency to favor these foods throughout their adult lives. There are potential long term consequences associated with a highly processed diet, such as increased risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and stroke. It’s much harder to eat whole, healthy foods if you have had minimal



“Ultra-processed foods are ready to eat, convenient, packaged food products such as salty snacks, frozen meals, crackers, cookies and fast food. They are typically high in sodium, fat and added sugar.”

*-Melissa Accardi, MS, RD, LDN,
Registered Dietitian, Nutritionist,
Wilfred R. Cameron Wellness Center*

experience with how to prepare them and build a preference for them during childhood and adolescence.

“Parents need to educate themselves about nutrition; they should learn how to read a food label and scan the ingredient list on the foods they buy, Accardi recommends. “There is a lot of information available online about nutrition. Try the CDC website www.myplate.gov or www.eatright.com. Learn how to make healthy swaps, such as whole wheat bread for your child’s peanut butter sandwich.”

The best way to reduce the consumption of ultra-processed foods is a simple one: cook more and make your own healthy food. Cook at home, cook from scratch, and do batch cooking on the weekends. You can have options ready to go for the week ahead, such as a big pot of chili, soup or pasta salad. Keep it simple, eat a variety of foods, and always include vegetables. Frozen vegetables are fine. For snacking, consider healthy options like popcorn, nuts, fruit, Greek yogurt, low fat cheese and hummus.

When you are trying to improve your health, it’s best to take small steps, Accardi says. “Avoid making radical changes. Instead make one healthy, realistic choice at a time, such as reducing your consumption of salty chips, and as you attain that, you can build in another healthy habit.”

Despite the association of ultra-processed foods with adverse health outcomes, Accardi emphasizes that there is no evidence that they directly cause cancer, heart disease, obesity or other conditions. Consumption of ultra-processed foods increases the risk, but these are complex diseases created by multiple factors.



To contact Melissa Accardi, call (724) 250-5207. To learn more about the Wilfred R. Cameron Wellness Center, visit www.wrcameronwellness.org.

Emergency Department vs. Urgent Care – How to Decide?

By Lois Thomson

You're sick or injured or have a medical problem, but is it serious enough to go to the emergency department, or will an urgent care center be able to handle your problem? Many people face this dilemma because timing can often be critical. Here are some guidelines that may be helpful.

Consider the ED for such emergencies as:

- Severe pain or bleeding anywhere on the body
- Trouble breathing
- Passing out, dizziness, or fainting
- Not being able to speak, see, walk, or move
- Broken bones
- Deep wounds
- Serious burns
- Severe allergic reaction with trouble breathing, swelling, hives
- High fever
- Drug or alcohol overdose



On the other hand, an urgent care center should be able to handle:

- Common illnesses, such as colds, flu, earaches, sore throats, migraines, low-grade fevers, and rashes
- Lesser injuries, such as sprains, back pain, minor cuts and burns, minor broken bones, or minor eye injuries

However, extreme emergencies, such as choking, electric shock, neck or spine injuries, or severe chest pain, may require a call to 911.

Pennsylvania Ranks in the Middle for Best Brain Health



As life expectancy increases, maintaining a healthy brain becomes more and more important to both mental and physical health. With that as a backdrop, a study by Life Extension discloses that Pennsylvania ranks 26th overall among the states for the best brain health. Some individual statistics reveal that approximately 70 percent of Pennsylvanians eat fruit and vegetables every day, and nearly 76 percent exercise on a regular basis, but 39 percent do not get enough sleep.

In addition, the CDC reports that nearly 6 million Americans suffer from dementia, and while there is no cure, augmenting brain health may help prevent it. Some ways to do that include:

- Maintain healthy eating by following the Mediterranean diet – fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats from fish, olive oil, avocado, and nuts
- Supplement where necessary with vitamins and minerals
- Make it a priority to get not just enough sleep, but quality sleep
- Accept the challenge of learning something new – a new language, a new instrument, a new hobby – to keep your mind sharp

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Affiliation with UPMC Ensures WHS Will Be Caring for Local Residents for Years

By Andrew Wilson

Washington Health System's (WHS) mission of providing Great Patient Care close to home began in 1897 as a single entity providing healthcare services and medical training. Since that humble beginning, WHS has grown into Washington County's largest employer with 2,700 employees at more than 40 locations across the region.

While this is an inspiring story of a great health system that has always strived to meet the healthcare needs of residents of Washington and Greene counties through innovative care provided by skilled professionals, WHS is not immune to the challenges being faced by rural hospitals across the country.

According to the Pittsburgh-based Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform, more than 150 rural hospitals closed between 2005 and 2019, and an additional 600 rural hospitals nationwide are at risk of closing due to financial pressures. In Pennsylvania, approximately 27 percent of rural hospitals are at risk due to declining patient volumes, increased overhead costs, and reduced government reimbursement for healthcare services.

After facing years of similar budget issues, WHS and its Board of Directors decided it was time to make a change that would enable the system to continue providing the best care for its patients for many years while also securing a rewarding future for its employees.

To accomplish this goal, the Board asked several regional healthcare providers to submit proposals to affiliate with WHS in 2022 and 2023. As an existing partner of more than a decade with WHS-UPMC shared specialty services for women's, children's and cancer care delivered within our communities, UPMC emerged as the best partner to help WHS maintain and enhance local healthcare services.

Through this partnership, in addition to preserving the health and vitality of WHS, UPMC has committed to maintain The Washington Hospital as an inpatient acute care general hospital and core services such as emergency care, diagnostics, ambulatory and primary care in Greene County for at least 10 years. This includes a \$300 million investment commitment over the next 10 years to enhance current – or create new – offerings at WHS that could attract more jobs and businesses to the region, while increasing the number of patients seeking high-quality medical care in Washington and Greene counties.

That last point is significant. The impact of WHS on the communities that surround it, and that it serves, cannot be overstated.



Its outsized positive economic effects are tangible. According to the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP), Washington Health System brought \$270 million of direct benefit to the state's economy in 2022.

Those are hard dollars that provide jobs not just for WHS employees, but also local businesses that interact with WHS. In addition, exceptional healthcare attracts new talent to the community and helps generate and sustain vibrant and economically active communities. When added to the \$270 million direct benefit projected by HAP, the trickle-down financial effects of WHS in 2022 were estimated to total a staggering \$256 million dollars. That renders the total economic benefit of the system – that year – to well over \$500 million dollars.

The economic impact is not the primary reason for this affiliation, however. This affiliation will be good for patients, ensuring local access to care and maintaining and possibly expanding services available at WHS. That is good news for the community, who depend on access to top notch healthcare services, and it is good news for the employees who can keep their job while continuing to serve the people of Washington and Greene counties.

The benefits of WHS' decision to affiliate with UPMC are clear, and WHS remains dedicated to sustaining the highest level of care that local patients expect and deserve. The regulatory approval process is still ongoing, but WHS is hopeful that it will be completed as soon as possible. In the meantime, the best news is what the affiliation with UPMC will mean for WHS.

"Our affiliation with UPMC will ensure that when you – our patients and community partners – need us, we'll be there for you. Just as we are now," Brook Ward, President & CEO of Washington Health System. "We're taking action to keep that mission, now and for many years to come."



Visit www.healthcaretogether.org for more information and to receive updates on this important process.



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RESEARCH NEWS

By Nancy Kennedy

Medical research is the engine that drives medical progress and innovation. Research scientists develop new technologies, therapy options, new medications and procedures and add them to their repertoire of interventions and treatments, for the benefit of patients. In this and future issues of The Guide to Good Health, we will present brief summaries of current and recent research studies that are interesting and innovative, and may have relevance for your health and that of your loved ones.

Pennsylvania ranks 24th for the most expensive assisted living facilities

The state of Pennsylvania is experiencing a surge of demand for assisted living facilities, as the Baby Boomer generation ages. Affordability, safety and competent caregiving are priorities for seniors with declining health or mobility, and for their families. In our state, the average cost of assisted living is \$4190, while the national average is \$4401. The alarming rise in costs is putting a financial strain on families and on the assisted living industry. This updated information was reported in the journal *Seniorly*.

Cardiology News: Too much protein intake can lead to atherosclerosis

The University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine has published a study in *Nature Metabolism* which reveals that excessive dietary protein intake can damage the arteries by increasing the amount of atherosclerosis, the loss of flexibility and blood flow in the arteries. Atherosclerosis is characterized by the deposit of plaque in the walls of the arteries, narrowing them. This can lead to heart attack and stroke. High intake of protein is a very popular trend in the U.S., especially among athletes and others who are striving to increase their muscle mass and strength. Previously, the development of plaque was believed to be associated with excessive intake of fat and cholesterol, but not protein.

Drug Resistant bacteria are responsive to an experimental treatment

The American Society for Microbiology has published a new article that describes an experimental treatment for a drug-resistant bacterial infection, known as *E. faecium*. The infection resisted the usual treatment and had recurred multiple times in a female patient despite antibiotics. Bacteriophage treatment, which utilizes viruses to infect and kill bacteria, was given to the patient along with antibiotics. The outcome was successful and the patient was discharged to home.

We knew that Autoimmune Diseases affect women more than men; now we know why

A research study conducted at Stanford University investigated the longstanding mystery about why 80% of people with autoimmune diseases are female. They were surprised to discover that the molecule known as Xist, that is made by one of a female's 2 X chromosomes can cause a woman to develop autoimmunity, in which antibodies try to destroy her own body tissues. These antibodies attack various organs in diseases such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, myositis, scleroderma and others.

Every female has two X chromosomes, while males have one X and one Y. The Xist molecule only exists in women, and produces RNA that silences the inactive X chromosome. This is believed to drive the development of autoimmune diseases. This discovery may be a breakthrough for the treatment of autoimmune diseases, many of which have no cure and are often disabling.

New research suggests that "scents" may be a new tool to enhance your recovery

A team of researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and UPMC Social Work department have discovered that smelling a familiar scent as part of their therapy might help individuals with depression to recover. The study, published in the *JAMA Network*, showed that odors and scents are more effective than words at helping patients access important memories. Memory recall is an important aspect of depression recovery; they help patients solve problems, regulate emotions and change their thought patterns. The study was headed by Kimberly Young PhD.

The Ever-Changing Healthcare Landscape

By Nick Jacobs

Ever since I became a healthcare executive—too many years ago than I like to remember—I have tried to learn as much as I can about the different ways humans try to improve and maintain their health. This has led me to explore new ideas, engage leaders in the fields of wellness and, of course, read anything and everything I can to expand my knowledge—all in the interest of helping others

Recently, I read *The Age of Scientific Wellness*, by Drs. Leroy Hood and Nathan Price, which explores their vision to work to eliminate chronic disease. Now in his mid-80s, Dr. Hood developed many of the initial automated DNA and Protein sequencers helpful in the first mapping of the human genome.

According to Dr. Hood, he believes the future of medicine will be Four P's: Predictive, Preventable, Personalized and Participatory. Many of the challenges and roadblocks he described 15 years ago are either still a reality or have been exasperated by the political breakdown and polarizations brought by masking and immunization rules introduced during COVID-19. On the plus side, we see great progress in areas such as AI and genome-mapping costs.

Drs. Hood and Price describe our current healthcare system with the following pattern: Wait for something to go wrong; try to identify the cause of the problem; try to fix it; if the fix works, try it on the next person to exhibit the same symptoms; and treat complications caused by the disease or the fix—or sign the death certificate.

They also state that, “If you get one disease such as diabetes, you are more than likely to get sick with another.” Thus, diabetes equals coronary artery disease, kidney disease, or dementia. Also true, they say: “Risk factors for one disease are the starting point for another.”

One of the interesting findings revealed in the book was that fewer deaths occurred from COVID-19 in places like Japan where, compared to the U.S., the levels of diabetes, hypertension and obesity are much lower. This further affirms why scientific wellness is critical to our future.

Dr. Hood's views the human body and its function as an interlocking system. Yet the structure of our medical system calls for us to see our bodies in binary terms: we are either sick or well. Dr. Hood takes a different view, saying we live in “a spectrum of wellness” and



by adopting this perspective, we can optimize our wellness time. Currently, most of us live through the wellness phase for 10 to 15 years of adult life, or about 20 percent of our time on Earth. Dr. hood says this is true because it has been almost impossible to see these disease transitions but in the book, he and Dr. Price say, “Soon we will be able to identify these transitions and safely intervene, and in many cases reverse, the movement to disease and return individuals to outright wellness.”

The book provides numerous statistics (some difficult to hear). For example, by age 44, one out of four Americans has at least one diagnosable disease, while 75 percent have a recognizable disease by age 65. Bottom line: we live more than half of our lives bearing some disease. Another bit of information to consider: 86 percent of the \$4 trillion spend on health care in the United States is on chronic disease.

Drs. Hood and Price believe wellness can extend from our 20s to beyond our 80s. They are focusing on three areas to explore to help create more wellness and a life of healthfulness: analysis of our genomes, our phenomes (the set of phenotypic entities in a cell, tissue, organ, organism and species) and personal digital measurements. Each of these represents opportunities and challenges

The authors also take a comprehensive look into the idea of brain health and verify a hot topic today, that chronological age does not always correspond with biological age. Or, simply stated, life span does not always equal health span.

> Nick Jacobs is a partner with SMR, LLC and founder of the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine, former board member of the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine, Jacobs maintains a website, Healinghospitals.com.



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The buses of Westmoreland Transit have gone through a technological transformation! The Fixed Route Transportation System (FRITS) project is in its final stages of completion and is bringing state of the art technology to Westmoreland Transit buses. What does this mean for Westmoreland Transit riders? Riders will now have the ability to track their bus in real time through the myStop® mobile app! The free myStop® app can be downloaded on the app store for your mobile device. Riders will also be able to plan trips and transfers, sign up for rider alerts, and learn about route changes and detours with ease and efficiency through the Westmoreland Transit myStop® website at <https://wcta.rideralerts.com/InfoPoint/>.

If you are not able to download the myStop® application or use the website there are other options to access information on the bus route you need. If you call Westmoreland Transit at (724) 834-9282, there will now be an option to choose from that will give you real-time bus information. There will also be texting capabilities; for any stop, a rider can text WCT + the bus stop number to the number 321123. For example, if a rider texts WCT1 to 321123 they will learn about the upcoming service to the Transit Center (which is stop 1). We hope this technology will make it easier for our riders to utilize the services we have while staying informed about Westmoreland County Transit Authority.

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Senior Guide

Senior Health • Home Care/Hospice
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Personal Care is Personal

Choosing where you want to live, especially when you're considering personal care, is a complex decision, one in which you weigh many factors, big and small, tangible and intangible.

When Bill Baker, 94, retired from his job as a chemical engineer at Merck, he discovered he had an uncanny knack for a traditional art form — woodcarving. A friend had dragged him along to a carving demonstration and he was quickly engaged in learning, and ultimately mastering, the new skill. Before long, he became a woodcarving teacher at Oglebay Woodcarvers' Guild in Wheeling, WV.

There is a lot of joy and satisfaction in creating something beautiful with just your hands and a few tools. For Bill, who had been a drummer in a local band, in addition to his career as an engineer, carving was a relaxing — quiet — pastime. He appreciated the skill and high level of craftsmanship required for woodcarving and enjoyed creating art as well as practical items.

When it came time for Bill to look at personal care options, he wanted a place where he could continue his hobby, a place where he and his woodworking tools were welcome. At Presbyterian SeniorCare Network, the staff at Westminster Place personal care community understood how important this pastime was to Bill. They made sure he could keep creating his cheery holiday characters and other charming works.

Soon after moving in, he found a fellow woodcarver and kindred spirit in Tana Pierro. Tana, an occupational therapy doctoral student from Pitt, was spending five weeks at Presbyterian SeniorCare Network as part of her studies. Together they created a shadowbox featuring his woodcarving and other interests to be hung outside his door.

The personal care community that's physically, emotionally and spiritually right for you or your loved one is the one that considers the needs of the whole person — hobbies and all!



To learn more about personal care options for your loved one, visit **Presbyterian SeniorCare Network** online at www.srcare.org/assisted-living-pittsburgh.

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Senior Guide



Does Medicare Have Penalties?

By *Crystal A. Manning*

Medicare isn't the easiest program to understand, and enrollment penalties can cause fear among elderly Americans, who are generally concerned about money in retirement. As a result, many people are unsure of how and when to enroll. Not enrolling in time could result in financial penalties, so it's important to know your initial enrollment period and work with a licensed Medicare advisor to ensure you get the right coverage at the right time.

You might be wondering why enrollment penalties exist in the first place. Medicare late enrollment penalties exist to ensure there is a large pool of individuals paying premiums. Insurance companies rely on a large number of members, especially healthier members, to be able to cover the needs of the entire group. Basically, if everyone signed up only when they needed insurance, then there wouldn't be enough money for them to cover the medical costs for everyone needing care.

MEDICARE LATE ENROLLMENT PENALTIES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

The majority of Americans receive premium-free Medicare Part A, for which there is no late enrollment penalty, regardless of when you enroll. You must have worked 40 quarters or 10 years, or be a dependent of someone that did, to qualify for premium free part A.

If you don't sign up for Medicare Part B during your Initial Enrollment Period, and you don't qualify for a Part B Special Enrollment Period, you'll have a monthly penalty for every month you did not enroll in Medicare Part B. These penalties do not go away.

A penalty can be a huge burden, especially for seniors, who are

Continued on following page

Senior Guide

often on fixed incomes. To avoid the Part B penalty, be aware of both your Initial Enrollment Period and your eligibility for Special Enrollment Periods. Your IEP is when you can first sign up for Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance), and it starts 3 months before you turn 65 and ends 3 months after the month you turn 65.

WHAT ARE THE PENALTIES?

Medicare Part A Penalty

The penalty for Part A is 10% of the current Part A premium. Most people are entitled to Part A for free for paying the Medicare tax while still working. If no employment history or not enough working history (based on credits), out-of-pocket premiums will be applied.

Medicare Part B Penalty

The penalty for Part B is a 10% increase on the Part B premium for each full 12-month period not enrolled but eligible. This penalty does not go away. If eligible for a special enrollment period – enrolled in employer coverage, this penalty can be avoided. Special forms will need to be submitted as proof to Medicare that you did have creditable coverage.

Medicare Part D Penalty

The late penalty for Part D is 1% of the average monthly prescription drug premium (1% of \$33.06 in 2021) times the number of months late, rounded to the nearest 10 cents. The penalty is generally enacted if not enrolled within 3 months of Medicare Part A or Part B. This penalty is permanent – must be paid while enrolled in Prescription Drug Coverage.

You may not have to pay the penalty if you had health insurance through your job or your spouse's job when you were first eligible to sign up for Medicare Part B.

Navigating the Medicare maze can be tricky, and that's why we're here to help! Schedule an appointment or call now to speak with a licensed Medicare Advisor who can help you:

- Understand your options and enrollment periods
- Sign up for the best coverage for your individual needs
- Feel at ease, knowing you're supported every step of the way

➤ For more information, contact **Crystal Manning** at (412) 716-4942 or crystalmanning33@gmail.com or **Dvonya Sedlacko** at (412) 657-3889 or djsedlacko@gmail.com.



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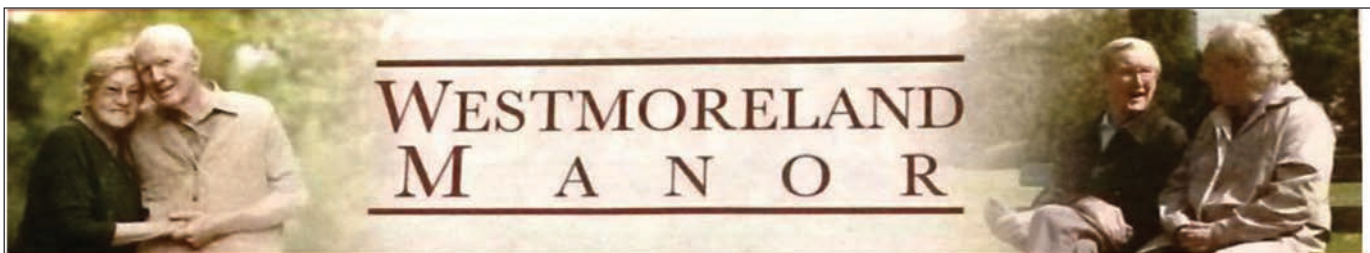
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Prime Time Adult Care Serves as Adult Day Center

By Lois Thomson

"We are here to help keep you in your home!" That's how Jason Dolby, director of Prime Time Adult Care in Bethel Park, describes the aim of his adult day center.

Prime Time achieves this goal by providing adult day services to those with a variety of needs in the South Hills of Pittsburgh. Adults who attend spend the day receiving care for needs that range from socialization to advanced dementia care. "We're open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday," Mr. Dolby said. He said some clients enroll for two or three days a week, while some come for all five. "This arrangement not only helps the participants themselves, but is advantageous to the caregivers

as well by providing them with a much-needed respite."

Prime Time begins the day with a social hour and light breakfast between 8 and 9 a.m., and then the fun begins. A typical day at Prime Time includes activities such as modified exercise, mentally stimulating games like bingo and trivia, physical games like bowling, arts and crafts, musical performances, and much, much more! Mr. Dolby states that all their activities serve a dual purpose of not only being fun, but also being beneficial to the participant's whole self: body, mind, and spirit. He said the facility also has a patio area, where folks have a chance to spend a portion of every day in the summer.

Because all people may not be



able to take part in all activities, Mr. Dolby said Prime Time has two separate areas, referred to as A unit and B unit. B unit is for higher-functioning individuals who can participate in activities with moderate assistance. The A unit is for people who need more help, and it is where a lot of participants with advanced dementia attend. He pointed out, "We're required by regulation to have a 1-to-7 ratio of staff to clients. The ratio here is 1 to-5 for the B group and 1-to-3 for A, so they get more one-on-one assistance. If we have a main activity like corn hole, and somebody doesn't want to participate, we'll have a secondary activity for them to perhaps play cards or do a little craft."

He said the facility can accept 20 clients in the B unit and 13 in A, and that some people have been there for more than 10 years.

Mr. Dolby meets with people who are interested to determine if Prime Time is able to care for them. "We're regulated by the state, so they are required to do a few things like get a physical

Jason Dolby, director of Prime Time Adult Care, said the facility is a medical model, which means nurses are on staff who can provide services such as administering blood pressure, and monitoring blood pressure and weight. "We can do special diets, diabetes care, insulin administration, small wound care." He recently conducted a survey and said that while you expect it to be good, "It was close to all 5s. We had a state inspection in December and were violation-free."

and a TB test."

Prime Time Adult Care, located in Christ United Methodist Church in Bethel Park, started as a mission of the church in 1985. "Don't go to a personal care home, we'll support you," said Mr. Dolby.

➤ For more information, call (412) 835-6661 or visit www.primetimeadultcare.com.

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SENIOR GUIDE

2024



Business Spotlight: At Home Senior Services

At Home Senior Services is independently owned and operated by Mary Jo Dietrich, RN, BSN, and her husband David John Dietrich, PhD. They have over 16+ years of operational experience and have assisted 1,700+ families over those years in our local communities.

They provide non-medical in-home senior care and daily companionship for you and your loved one. Whether it is a Home Care Companion, a Home Health Aid, or a Certified Nurse Assistant that you need, At Home Senior Services can help.

Mary Jo has a passion for seniors and serves as an advocate for families who find themselves in need of in-home care consultation. They can help you through the myriad of care, payment, and insurance options. They are licensed with the State of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Department of Aging Program as an in-home care provider and work with the Veterans Aid and Attendance Program, Veterans Home Maker Program, long-term care insurance companies, they work alongside hospice care, and private pay clients. Most importantly, they are here for you ... to understand, evaluate, and meet your family's needs. Their services are available for as little as four (4) hours a day to 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Their ultimate goal is to promote aging in place, which simply means to keep you or your loved one at home and remain independent with the care and assistance of their qualified caregiving staff.

At Home Senior Services offers an in-home care assessment, where Mary Jo, who is a registered nurse, comes to your home to meet you and your family to discuss your loved one's needs.

Retired or semi-retired individuals considered to have a gratifying part-time job in helping seniors stay independent in the comfort of their own homes. Seniors need a little assistance to stay out of a facility, so consider a part-time, flexible job with us!



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Bathing - Respectful assistance with bathing, toileting, dressing, and grooming.

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Meal Preparation - We ensure that nutrition and dietary needs are met consistently.

Medication Reminders - Our caregivers will monitor medication so seniors don't get off track.

Safety Supervision - We help seniors navigate their home environment with confidence and safety.

Transportation - Our caregivers provide transportation to stores, doctors visits, and personal outings.

Exercise - We promote daily exercise routines to keep seniors healthy and active

She performs a nursing assessment, to then create a customized in-home care plan with the family.

At Home Senior Services choose their caregivers very carefully through an extensive hiring process, which sets them apart from other in-home care services. Each person is meticulously screened, interviewed, and evaluated. In order to join their staff, they must also be friendly, compassionate, and have a commitment for helping seniors. In addition to the usual screening criteria, they also perform:

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Hospice

Singing the Praises of Music Therapy for Hospice Patients

By Evalisa McClure, BSN, RN
VITAS® Healthcare General Manager

Music is so much more than notes on a scale, lyrics and a musical instrument. For our hospice patients and their families in the Pittsburgh area, music is a powerful and meaningful complementary therapy that supports quality of life at the end of life.

Just ask Valerie Uschock, a licensed and certified music therapist whose musical talents have delighted and helped VITAS® Healthcare hospice patients since 2010. Valerie provides music therapy to adult and pediatric hospice patients as part of an interdisciplinary team here in Western Pennsylvania.

Hospice care focuses on pain relief, symptom management, comfort care and quality of life. The vast majority of hospice care is provided in the home, wherever a patient calls home, supported, when medically appropriate, continuous care at home, inpatient hospice care and respite care to afford a break to a caregiver.

Because hearing is one of the body's last active senses, music's impact on hospice patients can be profound. That's true, according to medical studies and Valerie's own experiences. Music can deliver a sense of calm or relaxation, trigger pleasant memories, ease pain, facilitate communication, lessen anxiety, and soothe the feelings of depression and loss that can arise at the end of life.

Music therapy can be particularly effective for non-responsive



Certified music therapist Valerie Uschock provides music therapy to VITAS® adult and pediatric hospice patients as part of an interdisciplinary team here in Western Pennsylvania.

patients, such as those with progressive Alzheimer's disease/dementia, or those whose diagnosis inhibits their ability to speak or communicate.

"When I'm singing or playing music for a hospice patient, I can always tell when someone's right there with me, even if it's just for a few seconds," says Valerie. "I might sense visible relaxation, a moment of focused attention, or a patient who opens her eyes for the first time in months. It's a small but very profound acknowledgement of the value of music."

At VITAS, music therapy plans of care are individualized for each patient. Some are encouraged to create, sing, perform and move to their preferred music genre. Some learn to play a musical instrument for the first time, while others can simply listen to

a music therapist perform or sing.

At VITAS, we combine music therapy with other supportive complementary therapies to bring comfort, compassionate care and quality of life to our Pittsburgh-area patients and their families. They can also take advantage of massage therapy, Paw Pals® pet visits, guided imagery/relaxation techniques and other solutions.

> For more information about music therapy, contact the VITAS program by calling (412) 799-2101 or visit VITAS.com. Let's make beautiful music together!

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Music has a proven ability to uplift spirits and calm anxious minds. Two big reasons why VITAS® Healthcare offers music therapy to patients near the ends of their lives. Music therapy can cover a wide range of activities, to include recalling classic tunes, clapping and singing.

VITAS's music therapists expertly wield the therapeutic power of music. Call 412.799.2101 to find out more.

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The Importance of Attending Appointments with Elderly Parents

By Lois Thomson

Doctors' appointments can be stressful for anyone, but the elderly may be especially confused about issues they are experiencing or have questions but aren't sure how to express them. Having someone accompany them to appointments can help ease their mind and can also make sure the physician's explanations and recommendations are understood and relayed to the patient.

If you are attending the appointment with an elderly parent, you might want to discuss the following:

- Mention any concerns you have, whether you've noticed lapses in memory, pain your loved one is experiencing, etc. Your doctor can gain a better outlook when he or she realizes what you are observing.
- If tests are being performed, ask what their purpose is.
- If new medications are being prescribed, ask about possible side effects and ascertain that the medications will not have a



negative reaction with ones currently being taken; also be sure to note the schedule of usage.

- On a regular basis, review all prescriptions with the physician; some may no longer be necessary and therefore can be eliminated, or can have the dosage reduced.

- Ask about local resources that may be available, such as Meals on Wheels or transportation options, to help ease day-to-day tasks. The physi-

cian will likely be familiar with and able to recommend such support groups.

- Make a note if you see any changes – physical or mental – as your parent ages. The doctor may be able to point out things to watch for that could be based on underlying conditions.

Equally important, be sure to treat your parent with respect during the appointment. Don't treat them like a child and allow them to respond or ask questions as they are able.



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Senior Living

Tips for Transitioning to Senior Living

By Lois Thomson

As the elderly population continues to grow (the number of those 65-and-older is expected to reach more than 20 percent by 2040), the need for facilities and services to care for them continues to rise.

If the time comes for your parent to move out of the home and into a new residence, planning ahead can help to make the transition easier.

One step that can begin well ahead of time is the process of downsizing gradually. Work together to determine which possessions are necessary and will also fit well in a future new space.

Another is to explore different options early. Visit facilities ahead of time to check out available services and amenities, the amount of assistance offered, social activities, etc., as well as convenience. In addition, many residences have a waiting period, so the earlier you have an idea in mind, the easier and faster the transition may be.

Search for places that place a focus on stimulating the mind. Some offer lectures, group outings, workshops, performances, and the like



– all of which help to keep residents engaged and the mind sharp. This can boost happiness and lead to an overall sense of purpose.

Don't be afraid to engage in conversation with your parent and be sure to emphasize the positive aspects of a new community. The earlier and more often you discuss the move, the easier it will be for your parent to adjust to what will be taking place.

Such a transition can be stressful – both physically and mentally – for everyone involved, but planning ahead can help to make it less so.

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ChipsDental.com

DISABILITY RESOURCES

Voices for Independence
724-223-5115 • www.vficil.org

TRPIL (Transitional Paths to Independent Living)

724-223-5115 | TTY: 724-228-4028
Toll-Free: 1-877-889-0965
trpil.com

HEALTH, WELLNESS AND FITNESS CENTERS

The Community & Recreation Center at Boyce Mayview Park

412-221-1099
www.twpusc.org/crc/cre-home

WHS Wilfred R Cameron Wellness Center

724-225-WELL • wrcameronwellness.org

HEARING

HearingLife

724-638-4075 • Hearinglife.com

HEPATITIS VACCINE

Allegheny County Health Department Immunization Clinic

• 412-578-8062

HOSPICE

VITAS® Healthcare

800-723-3233 • VITAS.com

HOSPITALS

Advanced Surgical Hospital

724-884-0710 • www.ashospital.net
Orthopedic Surgery Hospital
Onsite MRI and PT/OT Services

Heritage Valley Health System

HeritageValley.org • 1-877-771-4847
Heritage Valley Beaver 724-728-7000
Heritage Valley Kennedy 412-777-6161
Heritage Valley Sewickley 412-741-6600

St. Clair Health

412-942-4000 • stclair.org

WHS Washington Hospital

724-225-7000 • www.whs.org

IMAGING

St. Clair Health Medical Imaging Services

Offered at outpatient centers in Mt. Lebanon,
Bethel Park, and Peters Township
412-942-8150
stclair.org/medicalimaging

IMAGING

Heritage Valley Robinson Twp Medical Neighborhood

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Appointments, call 866-251-0710.

INCONTINENCE

Tri-Medical

800-541-0734 • www.trimedonline.com

LIFT CHAIRS, MATTRESSES, BEDS

Sleep Pittsburgh

412-462-7858
www.SleepPittsburgh.com

MASSAGE THERAPY

Honor Your Body Wellness

412-212-0231
www.honoryourbodywellness.com

ORTHOPEDICS

Advanced Orthopaedics & Rehabilitation

1-800-828-CAST (2278)
www.advancedorthopaedics.net

Heritage Valley Orthopedics

Heritage Valley Beaver 724-775-4242
Heritage Valley Kennedy 412-787-7582
Heritage Valley Sewickley 412-262-7800
www.heritagevalley.org/services/
orthopedics/

St. Clair Health Center for Orthopedics

412-942-4000
stclair.org/centerfororthopedics

WHS Orthopedics and Sport Medicine

724-206-0610 • whsdocs.org

ORTHODONTICS

Good Orthodontics

Washington 724-225-1114
Mount Lebanon 412-344-4663
Pleasant Hills 412-655-4660

PEDIATRICS

WHS Washington Pediatrics

724-250-6001 • www.whs.org

PHYSICAL THERAPY

FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Centers

McMurray 724-941-7070
Bethel Park 412-347-0022
Cecil/South Fayette 724-338-2062
Monroeville 412-457-8200
Bridgeville 412-785-0111
www.fyzical.com

WHS Outpatient Rehabilitation

724-250-6280 • whs.org/rehab

PHYSICIANS

Heritage Valley Robinson Township Medical Neighborhood

HeritageValley.org
Home to a variety of services and physician
practices.

HVMG Park Manor Medical Associates

2201 Park Manor Blvd
412-749-6920 • HeritageValley.org
Same Day Sick Visits, Self scheduling at
cms.hvhs.org/carelink/

St. Clair Health St. Clair Medical Group Network

physicians.stclair.org

Washington Physician Hospital Organization Provider Network

whs.org - See pages 21-24

REHABILITATION

Advanced Orthopaedics & Rehabilitation

1-800-828-CAST (2278)
www.advancedorthopaedics.net

VEIN CARE

Three Rivers Vein Center

412-677-9842
threeriversveincenter.com

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Advanced Women's Care of Pittsburgh, P.C.

724-941-1866
www.advancedwomenscareofpgh.com

*To be included in this affordable directory, email
goodhealthmag@aol.com or call (412) 877-5321*

Growing Fields of Healthcare

By Lois Thomson

The COVID pandemic highlighted a desperate need for more physicians and nursing personnel but has also been at least partly responsible for other growth changes taking place in the healthcare industry.

The increasing demand for in-home care services has necessitated the growth of Home Health Agencies, particularly for the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

Similarly, the demand for Telehealth Services has increased following the pandemic, allowing patients to access medical advice through remote consultations. This shift has not only enhanced the convenience for patients but has also increased efficiency for healthcare providers.



Quarantines and lack of social interaction caused by the pandemic also fueled the growth of Mental Health issues and resulting awareness. Discussions about mental health are now significant to healthcare, resulting in an expanded range of services.

Because managing and safeguarding patient data has become increasingly important, Health Information Technology is rapidly advancing within the healthcare field. The development of electronic health records enables more personalized care and tailored treatment plans.

The growing need for advanced healthcare, and the subsequent research, is driving the Biotech and Pharmaceutical areas to new levels. Additionally, this is resulting in more effective manufacturing processes.

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