

HEALTH MATTERS



HEART HEALTH & DIABETES ISSUE

INSIDE:

Salinas In The Zone

Delivering Diabetes Education
Coming Back from a Heart Attack
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Contents

HEALTH MATTERS
Monterey County's Health Magazine

February 2020, Volume 8, No. 69



12

Community Innovations

CHI fights diabetes with new campaign

FEATURED STORY

8

Moving Into The Blue Zone

Fitness project expands to rest of the county



14

Staying on the Right Path

Natividad center helps manage diabetes

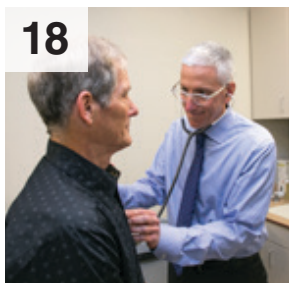


16

Diets and Diabetes

Experts say more exercise and fiber, less sugar

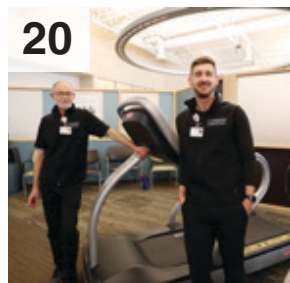
18



The Hole Truth

New heart procedure to be offered at SVMHS

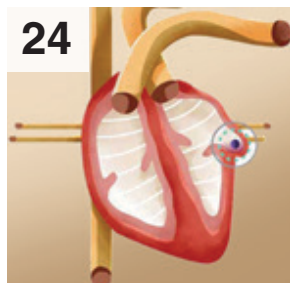
20



On the Way Back

Cardiac rehab important for heart attack patients

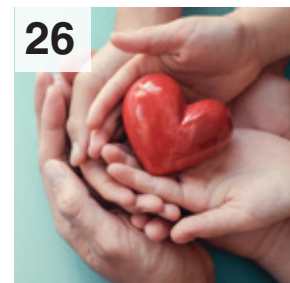
24



Welcome to Watchman

Implanted device cuts down on need for blood thinners

26



Healthy Heart Programs

Central Coast YMCA offers health education, advice

30



Doctor's Notes

Medical news from around Monterey County

Important Statistic

DID YOU KNOW?

- > Every year, about 805,000 Americans experience a heart attack. Of these, 605,000 are a first heart attack, and 200,000 happen to people who have already had a heart attack. About one in five heart attacks is silent—the damage is done, but the person is not aware of it.

Reference: Centers for Disease Control, cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm

Heart Health & Diabetes

ISSUE

Community and health care leaders gather at Salinas City Hall to promote the Blue Zones Project in Monterey County.
Cover Photo by Randy Tunnell





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Editor's Desk



Photo by Susan Gerbic

This month's issue is Heart Health & Diabetes, two topics that have long been on my mind due to my family's health history. My maternal grandmother had diabetes and died from a heart attack; my father's mother died from a stroke. Both were only in their early 60s.

As you'll find from reading this issue, the problems of diabetes and cardiovascular disease are closely intertwined. Diabetes is implicated in the majority of deaths due to heart disease, and it can cause a whole range of serious and life-limiting issues. There even appears to be an increased risk among diabetics to develop Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

But there is good news. The Blue Zones Project, our cover story this month, is poised to make important changes to our community and to get us moving and eating in a healthy way. And there are numerous programs that are making it possible for residents to get the diabetes education and support that they need.

Most importantly: Go get tested. I get tested every year for diabetes because I have a slightly elevated risk of developing the disease, based on my family history. That way, if a problem does develop, I can immediately take steps to combat it.

It's always better to know what's going on and to take action if necessary. And if you need help with any of it, our local medical professionals are standing by.

Here's to your health!

Kathryn McKenzie

HEALTH+ MATTERS

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GET
INTO
THE

Zone

BLUE ZONES PROJECT STARTS IN SALINAS, EXPANDS TO REST OF COUNTY

BY MELANIE BRETZ

WHAT IF A COMMUNITY could come together to make all of its residents healthier? That's the idea behind the Blue Zones Project, which has launched in parts of Salinas, and will eventually involve individuals, businesses and cities throughout Monterey County.

Blue Zones are designed to make healthy choices easier through permanent changes to a city's environment, policies and social networks. Currently, 50 U.S. communities—the 47th being four specific ZIP code areas in Salinas—have joined the Blue Zones Project, impacting more than 3.4 million Americans nationwide.

When leaders at Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System learned of the Blue Zones Project a few years ago, they launched an effort to secure a site assessment. "Site assessments explore the willingness and readiness of area governments, hospitals, schools, faith-based organizations, restaurants, grocery stores, businesses and individuals to commit to improving health, wellness and longevity," says Tiffany DiTullio, executive director of the local Blue Zones Project and SVHMS chief administrative officer of wellness.

"The Blue Zones Project really captured our imagination," says SVMHS president/CEO Pete Delgado. "It fits perfectly with our mission and creates an opportunity to bring our community together to help people live longer, healthier, happier lives."

BLUE ZONES PROJECT MONTEREY COUNTY
STAFF MEMBERS LISA WEGLEY, LEFT,
AND CLARISSA DELGADO.

"We are excited to be part of the Blue Zones expansion project, as it is an ideal fit with our mission of improving overall health in Monterey County," says Dr. Steven Packer, president/CEO of Montage Health.

DiTullio says that the Central Blue Zones Project team visited Salinas in August 2019 and reported that they found the second highest readiness score of all Blue Zones Project communities. Site assessments will be expanded to the Monterey Peninsula and South Monterey County this year.

The Blue Zones Project began in the early 2000s when Dan Buettner, an author and National Geographic Fellow, began investigating why people in some areas of the world have longer, healthier lives. He and other scientists found that residents of these "blue zones" shared nine specific characteristics, which have been named the Power 9 in the nationwide Blue Zones Project. The Power 9 include regular natural movement, life purpose, stress reduction, moderate caloric intake, a plant-based diet, moderate alcohol intake, engagement in spirituality or religion, engagement in family life, and engagement in social life.

The Blue Zones Project was put into practice beginning in 2009 in Minnesota and has since spread to 11 states.

“

THE
BLUE ZONES
PROJECT
REALLY
CAPTURED
OUR
IMAGINATION.”

SVMHS PRESIDENT/CEO
PETE DELGADO

CHEF JASON GILES SERVES
UP HEALTHY FOODS AT
A BLUE ZONES EVENT.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SVMHS



Now, efforts are under way to implement some Blue Zones modifications to create healthy habits for Salinas residents.

One Blue Zones Project innovation is the idea of “walking moais,” groups that meet regularly to walk as well as to build social connections. “On January 12, we launched the community moai at Northridge Mall,” says DiTullio.

Another popular Power 9 lesson is “Plant Slant,” which encourages people to find creative ways to work more fruits and vegetables into their diet. “We have had multiple potluck moais that bring individuals together to experiment with plant-based foods, try new things and make connections,” says DiTullio.

Notably, the Monterey County Blue Zones Project is participating in the first ever disease-specific collaboration by partnering with Community Health Innovations on the Diabetes Innovation. (For more on CHI, see page 12.)

“With the shared goal of increasing awareness about diabetes through outreach and screenings as well as increasing the knowledge and utilization of diabetes prevention and treatment resources, this first ever innovation is an exciting addition to the project,” says DiTullio. Approximately 45 percent of Monterey County residents are estimated to have prediabetes or diabetes.

The end goal of the five-year process is to become a Blue Zones Project Approved Community and phase I—involving the Salinas zip codes of 93901, 93905, 93906 and 93907—is currently under way. A site assessment for Monterey Peninsula and South Monterey County communities is set for February 2020.

Taylor Farms is the first local business sponsor and a long-time supporter of health and wellness efforts in our area. “Our company is all about healthy food and healthy lives,” says Bruce Taylor, Taylor Farms CEO, “so getting behind this project is a natural fit for us.”

Others in the community have been equally supportive, like Victor Rey Jr., president of the SVMHS Board of Directors. “When I first heard

about the Blue Zones life, it truly resonated with me because I was on a personal health improvement journey,” says Rey, a lifelong Salinas resident who has worked in food production management for more than 15 years. “The Blue Zone Project aligned with the lifestyle I was seeking for myself and my family. Not only did I want to become involved, I also wanted to be an advocate for this lifestyle.

“THE COOL THING IS THAT THERE ARE EASY WAYS ONE CAN GET INVOLVED ON A PERSONAL LEVEL. LITTLE CHANGES REALLY ADD UP.”

“The Power 9 are noted as nine minor modifications that individuals can select based on the areas in their life they want to commit to small but meaningful change,” says DiTullio. Natural movement, for example urges individuals to find ways to move more—park further away, walk your dog, bring tennis shoes to work, and walk on break or incorporate walking meetings.

The project is currently four months into the Year 1 implementation phase. “We are happy to be working collaboratively with numerous agencies to align and elevate the great work they are doing,” DiTullio says. “We are collaborating with Ecology Action on a grant for safe routes to parks, and with the Transportation Agency for Monterey County on their safe routes to schools project.

“All of these elements support the goals of the project—accessibility, walkability, bikeability and access to healthy foods. We are working with Salinas Regional Sports Authority to enhance the amazing walking path they installed as part of their four-phase soccer complex, adding benches with shade options and interactive workout equipment along the route to encourage uses of that space.”

CONTINUE TO PAGE 10



A team from the national Blue Zones Project takes a walking tour of downtown Salinas in 2018. PHOTO COURTESY OF SVMHS

“

GETTING BEHIND
THIS PROJECT IS
A NATURAL FIT
FOR US.”

TAYLOR FARMS CEO
BRUCE TAYLOR

“The Blue Zones Project is about creating a culture of wellness in the community, leading to an increase in community pride, wellness and happiness levels, and reduction of health care costs and chronic diseases,” DiTullio says. “When we started this journey, we knew it was the right thing to do. We’re excited to work with our community, drawing on strengths and opportunities to create a sense of alignment and achieve common goals.”

The website, www.bluezones.com, is packed with interactive and informative features such as strategies for setting and achieving personal and community goals, recipes, exercise programs, examples of success, and a Blue Zones Test you can take to determine your healthy life expectancy, total life expectancy and potential life expectancy, as well as tips on how to extend it.

For information on the local project, visit montereycounty.bluezonesproject.com.

Melanie Bretz lives in Monterey and has written on a wide range of topics, including health care, during a writing career spanning more than 30 years.

HEART HEALTHY *Recipe*



Richard Green Photography

BARLEY AND ROASTED ARTICHOKE SALAD

Recipe courtesy of Chef Jason Giles and
Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System

Serves 8:

- 3 cups water
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano leaves, crushed
- 1 cup uncooked pearl barley
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 medium artichokes, cleaned and roasted until tender (Good quality jarred artichokes work as well, 4-6 oz.)
- 1 seedless (English) cucumber, peeled and diced (about 1 1/2 cups)
- 1 large red bell pepper, diced (about 1 1/2 cups)
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese (about 2 ounces)
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced (about 1/4 cup)
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley (optional)

HOW TO MAKE IT

STEP 1

Heat the water and oregano in a 2-quart saucepan over medium-high heat to a boil. Stir in the barley. Reduce the heat to low. Cover and cook for 45 minutes or until the barley is tender but still chewy. Spread the barley in a thin layer on a large plate and let cool for 15 minutes.

STEP 2

Beat the lemon juice, lemon zest and olive oil in a small bowl with a fork or whisk.

STEP 3

Stir the barley, cucumber, red pepper, cheese, artichokes and red onions in a large bowl. Add the lemon juice mixture and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour. Season to taste. Sprinkle with the parsley before serving, if desired.



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FIGHTING DIABETES

Community Health Innovations launches its new campaign

BY LISA CRAWFORD WATSON



debilitating condition—not just diabetes, but the related risks for hypertension, stroke and cardiac issues as well.”

In 2012, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula established CHI, a proactive population health management organization, to help keep community members healthy by bringing together providers and resources to coordinate care for patients. CHI focuses on improved patient experience, prevention, disease management and reduction of unnecessary hospital visits.

“CHI is dedicated to advancing health care delivery by developing all capabilities needed to improve the health of the people in our communities while reducing health care costs, thus creating a vibrant, engaged and healthy population,” Lorenzi says.

In 2016, Montage Health and Salinas Valley Memorial Health System formed a collaboration, with SVMHS acquiring part of CHI and a locally based Medicare Advantage plan, Aspire Health. By 2017, the partnership was in place to provide the appropriate tools, knowledge, and coordinated support to patients countywide to build a healthy and cohesive community.

IN REFLECTING UPON her eight years in the White House, Michelle Obama often has expressed her gratitude that, as First Lady, she was able to champion causes close to her heart. Among them, she said, was helping 45 million kids get healthier school breakfasts and lunches.

In a country where one in five adolescents and one in four young adults are living with prediabetes, as reported by the national Centers for Disease Control, Obama’s efforts seem well placed. Yet the problem continues to escalate. The CDC also reports that approximately 84 million American adults—more than one out of three—have prediabetes, 90 percent of whom don’t know they have it. Prediabetes increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Type 2, the most common type of diabetes, is a condition in which the body’s ability to produce or respond to the hormone insulin is impaired, resulting in abnormal metabolism of carbohydrates and elevated levels of glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood and urine. Over time, the elevated glucose levels in the blood can damage vital organs, including the heart, kidneys and eyes.



Liz Lorenzi

Monterey County has been trending higher than the national incidence of diabetes and prediabetes. Community Health Innovations is working overtime to stop the train and turn it around by empowering people to make healthy choices and adopt lifestyle practices that will promote wellness, and reduce the local rates of prediabetes and diabetes.

“Diabetes and prediabetes rates among children, adolescents, and adults are skyrocketing,” says Liz Lorenzi, vice president and chief operating officer of CHI. “This represents out-of-control growth of a really de-

“WE CAN’T TREAT CHILDREN IN ISOLATION; IT’S A FAMILY ISSUE. WE START BY TEACHING PARENTS.”



Dr. James Gilbert

Two years later, CHI created a five-year strategic plan to be implemented in 2019-2023, with the goal of developing a diabetes campaign that would get people’s attention, start a conversation, and get people and organizations in this county working together to reduce the incidence of prediabetes and diabetes in the community.

“The goal of this campaign, which began mid-January, is to educate people about Type 2 diabetes, to make them aware of the risks and to encourage them to reach out to us, so we can support them,” Lorenzi says. “Then we can provide them with education and resources to avoid, reverse or manage this debilitating disease.”

The problem does not necessarily begin in adolescence or adulthood. Obesity, traditionally defined as being more than 20 percent above normal weight, has become common in this county among toddlers and children, as well as adults.



"Years ago, when we had a Labrador retriever puppy, we were told there is no such thing as bad dogs, just bad owners. Similarly, when it comes to weight issues, we don't have culpable 3-year-olds. They can't and shouldn't be responsible for their nutritional choices," says Dr. James Gilbert, CHI senior medical director, who has been instrumental in establishing the diabetes initiative. "No parent has ill will—a chubby baby is a healthy baby, and a sign of success in family, and some of it is economic; not all families can afford nutritious food."

The problems, says Dr. Gilbert, are multifactorial. At a very young age, we start making numbers of fat cells. As we feed those cells, they increase. If we overfeed a toddler, we may be setting them up for a lifelong condition of excess fat cells. Maybe.

"It's complex. If you look at families," says Dr. Gilbert, "it's not atypical that overweight children have overweight parents. We can't treat children in isolation; it's a family issue. We start by teaching parents. When children become teens, they are in a better position to make their own nutritional decisions. Once they learn about healthy eating, they often get the whole family eating better."

The CHI-sponsored Diabetes Campaign is intended to inform, educate, inspire, and empower people to make lifestyle changes to benefit themselves and their families. People may be aware of diabetes but may not have accurate information. There exists a whole network of resources in this county to help people, says Ann Kern, vice president of clinical services operations for CHI. People with prediabetes can learn how to halt its progression, she says, and people with Type 2 diabetes can learn to manage and perhaps reverse it.

"Community Hospital and Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital treat people who are sick. They also invest money and resources to preserve the health of the community," says Kern. "These hospitals want to transform health in Monterey County by building a partnership for wellness. The collaboration between the two hospitals is unprecedented, and we are reaching out to Natividad Medical Center and CSU Monterey Bay as well."

"Diabetes is a beast," says Lorenzi. "Don't feed it." ■

Lisa Crawford Watson lives with her family on the Monterey Peninsula. She specializes in writing about art and architecture, health and lifestyle, and food and wine.

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STAYING ON THE RIGHT PATH

Natividad Diabetes Center helps people make positive changes

BY KATHRYN MCKENZIE



Lupe Bravo

Bravo says that diabetes educators first give patients a questionnaire and spend time getting to know them. The patient is given basic education on diabetes and learns how to use a glucose meter so they can measure their blood sugar at home. They are also counseling on the potential health effects of uncontrolled diabetes.

Diabetes is known as “the silent killer” because many people don’t know they have it until more serious symptoms appear. The condition results from the body’s inability to process sugar correctly. When sugar (also known as glucose) builds up in the blood, it can damage a variety of different organs and body systems—everything from the heart, kidneys and eyes to nerves and blood vessels.

DAVID GUTIERREZ knew that diabetes was a family problem. After all, his mother has it. His grandmother has it. His sister has diabetes, and his brother was also diagnosed with it last year.

And yet it still came as something of a shock to the 49-year-old Salinas resident when he visited his doctor last fall and got the news that he, too, had Type 2 diabetes.

“There’s a long line of diabetes in my family,” says Gutierrez, who is now successfully managing his condition with the help of the Natividad Diabetes Education Center in Salinas. With a combination of medication, diet and exercise, his blood sugar has dropped dramatically and his hemoglobin A1C level—a number that reflects blood glucose levels for the past three months—is also returning to normal.

Diabetes educators are monitoring his blood sugar and A1C test results on a regular basis and counseling him on diet, exercise, and other ways to control his condition. Gutierrez also credits his physician, Dr. Shane Walker, for diagnosing him and referring him to the diabetes center.

The Natividad Diabetes Education Center offers education for people of all ages with diabetes and pre-diabetes and is one of Natividad’s most successful programs. Although most patients come in through a doctor’s referral, anyone can walk in for education, says Natividad certified diabetes educator and quality coordinator Lupe Bravo. Bravo was honored in 2018 when she was named Diabetes Educator of the Year by a statewide organization.

In particular, diabetes is linked with heart disease and problems with the cardiovascular system. It’s estimated that at least 68 percent of diabetics age 65 and older die from heart disease, and 16 percent die from strokes, according to the American Heart Association.

Uncontrolled diabetes can also lead to blindness and problems with hands and feet that stem from nerve damage, which is called peripheral neuropathy. This leads to numbness or pain that can make it difficult to walk.

Gutierrez had noticed that he was drinking water “insatiably” in the months leading up to his diagnosis, and urinating frequently. That’s a common first symptom of diabetes. People may also feel unusually hungry or fatigued, have blurry vision or notice that cuts and bruises are slow to heal.

“I already had an understanding of diabetes” because of his family members’ diagnoses, Gutierrez says. “I know what I have to do to keep myself functioning.”

Now, he is careful not to eat foods that will spike his blood sugar, and is working on portion control by eating from smaller plates and bowls. The staff at Natividad Diabetes Education Center is also testing him regularly to make sure that he is continuing to progress in maintaining good number for his blood sugar and A1C.

CONTINUE TO PAGE 17

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DIETS AND DIABETES

Experts advocate more exercise, fiber, and less sugar

BY BARBARA QUINN-INTERMILL, MS, RDN, CDE



AS LONG as we have studied the ins and outs of nutrition science, experts have wrangled over the best diet to prevent and treat diseases like diabetes and heart disease. And that's good. As we delve into the mysteries of how the human body responds to substances in food, the more sound decisions we can make about how we eat.

For example, we now know that diabetes and heart disease are closely linked. That's because high blood sugars associated with diabetes can damage arteries, which leads to heart problems.

So what is the best diet to prevent or treat diabetes? Experts say it must provide these benefits:

- Improve blood sugars
- Help you reach (and maintain!) a healthful weight
- Normalize your blood pressure
- Protect your heart

A lofty list, to be sure. That's why a team of nutrition experts convened in 2019 to look at the most current nutrition evidence for the treatment of prediabetes, Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes (care.diabetesjournals.org).

These researchers found what most of us know intuitively. Given the wide spectrum of cultures, personal preferences and geographic locations in this world, there is no one eating plan that is best for everyone. Instead, these researchers found that a variety of eating styles can improve blood sugars, normalize weight and protect the heart if they include certain strategies.

For example, people with prediabetes (those on the verge of developing diabetes) can effectively lower their risk for developing diabetes with this proven game plan:

- Lose weight if you are overweight. Studies have shown that even a modest weight loss (7 to 10 percent of your starting weight) is enough to keep diabetes at bay.
- Exercise—regularly—at least 150 minutes a week.
- Eat at least 25 grams of dietary fiber a day. This means a diet high in plant-based foods such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, beans and whole grains.
- Eat less saturated fat, the type of fat most associated with internal inflammation, which is linked to diabetes and heart disease.

Similarly, the most successful approach to control Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes includes these strategies:

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Exercise at least 150 minutes a week.

- Eat a diet rich in dietary fiber (is this beginning to sound familiar?)
- Choose whole grains more often than refined grains. (Check the label for “whole” grain when choosing cereal, crackers and bread, for example.)
- Eat less saturated fat. (Compare products and choose those with less of this type of fat.)
- Cut back on added sugars, especially sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Drink alcohol moderately or not at all.

These experts concluded that these strategies can be incorporated into more than one eating pattern. Whether vegetarian, low carb, Mediterranean or DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), diets that are thoughtfully planned can control blood sugars and protect the heart if they are rich in dietary fiber and low in saturated fat and added sugars. ■

Barbara Quinn-Intermill is a registered dietitian nutritionist and certified diabetes educator. She is the author of “Quinn-Essential Nutrition: The Uncomplicated Science of Eating.” Email her at barbara@quinnessentialnutrition.com.

DIABETES RESOURCES

Resources throughout Monterey County can be found at Community Health Innovations, communityhealthinnovations.org/diabetes

Free online risk assessment at chomp.org/assessments can help you determine if you are at high, medium or low risk for diabetes.

Diabetes Prevention Program at Central Coast YMCA is based on research funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.centralcoastymca.org/programs/diabetes-prevention-program

Individual appointments and classes taught by certified diabetes educators are available at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Montage Health, (831) 649-7220, and at Natividad Diabetes Education Center, (831) 755-6292

Topics in Diabetes is a free monthly presentation by health experts on the latest trends in diabetes: chomp.org/diabetes

Diabetes support groups are free and ongoing monthly sessions moderated by a certified diabetes educator at locations in Monterey and Seaside. chomp.org/diabetes

Diabetes educators focus on motivating people to make healthier choices. The center staff encourages people get 30 minutes a day of any type of exercise and to eat non-starchy vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fat-free milk and yogurt, and to avoid sugar-sweetened foods.

Gutierrez is also weighing himself daily, and has a goal of eventually losing weight, which can also be helpful in controlling diabetes. He is walking 35 to 40 minutes twice a day and is spending more time gardening—an activity that can be a light to moderate workout. He is working with a center dietician to continue to improve his diet.

The center also offers ongoing group classes for diabetes education in Spanish, and classes in English are also available on request.

Gutierrez says that he is still trying to figure everything out, but he's happy to making positive progress on his health. Above all, his family and friends are encouraging him, and are keeping him on the right path, he says.

"I have good people in my life. It's a lot easier to handle when you have support," says Gutierrez. ■

Health Matters editor Kathryn McKenzie, a former Monterey Herald staff writer, now contributes to a variety of print publications and websites.



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THE HOLE TRUTH

New heart procedure soon available in Monterey County

BY TOM LEYDE



DR. HARLAN GROGIN EXAMINING A PATIENT. PHOTO COURTESY OF SVMHS

AS SALINAS VALLEY Memorial Healthcare System observes Heart Month 2020, it's in the process of introducing a heart repair procedure that was previously unavailable in Monterey County.

The procedure is called patent foramen ovale closure, or PFO closure for short. It is expected to be available in February or March, says, Dr. Harlan Grogin, a cardiologist at SVMC Central Coast Cardiology. Then patients won't have to travel out of the Monterey County area for the procedure.

PFO, or hole in the heart, is a common abnormality. It occurs in 20 percent to 34 percent of the population.

Everyone is born with a hole in the heart. When a baby comes into the world, he or she has an opening between the two upper chambers of the heart, the left atrium and the right atrium.

When the child is in the womb the lungs don't work, Grogin explains. The hole between the heart chambers allows oxygenated blood to flow to the unborn child. The PFO normally closes a year or two after the child is born. But in 15 percent to 20 percent of people, this hole doesn't close.

For most people, this condition requires no treatment. Others may have to take medication to prevent blood clots.

Discovering a PFO isn't easy, and it's something that is not usually investigated unless a patient is having symptoms. These can include severe migraines, transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), low blood oxygen levels, or stroke.

Up to half of patients who have had a stroke of unknown cause, also known as a cryptogenic stroke, may have a PFO. In patients who have had a stroke before age 55, this is especially true. Sometimes the PFO combines with another condition, such as atrial fibrillation, increasing the risk of stroke.

Studies have shown, Grogin says, that people who have a PFO and suffer a cryptogenic stroke do better when the hole is closed, rather than treating the problem with drug therapy.

If someone does have a PFO and a cryptogenic stroke, Grogin says, the cardiologist works in conjunction with a neurologist to determine if the patient could benefit from PFO closure.

In the procedure that SVMHC will offer, cardiac catheterization will be used to plug the PFO, a minimally invasive procedure.

In PFO closure, the doctor inserts a closure device on the end of a flexible tube that is fed through a vein in the groin. The device is guided into place with the assistance of an echocardiogram, which allows the doctor to view the passage of the journey of the catheter and closure device to the heart.

The hole-plugging device is then left in place and the tube is removed. The procedure takes less than an hour, Grogin says, and a patient can go home that day, or stay overnight at the hospital and return home in the morning.

Complications from the procedure are rare, but risks include a tear of the heart or blood vessels, dislodgment of the device and development of irregular heartbeats.

Two PFO closure devices have been approved in the United States: the Abbott Vascular Co. Stent and the Amplatzer PFO Occluder.

Doctors at SVMC Central Coast Cardiology are training to perform the PFO closure procedure. It is not unlike procedures physicians perform weekly at the facility.

"Basically," Grogin says, "we're doing it every week anyway. I think it's going to be a very straightforward procedure ... As technology gets better and better, we reap the benefits in many ways."

Grogin's team of doctors, says Karina Rusk, director of public relations and system communications at SVMHS, "have worked together for a long time. His team is like a well-oiled machine ... These are highly skilled people that have been working together for a long time," she said. "Doctor Grogin is one of the best and we're fortunate to have him."

SVMHS, which received five awards from the American Heart Association last year, also is offering transcatheter aortic valve replacement and CardioMems, an FDA-approved system that monitors a person's heart through a wireless sensor that detects changes in blood pressure and blood flow. ■

Tom Leyde is a freelance writer and a veteran print journalist who lived for many years in Salinas, and now makes his home in Arizona.

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ON THE WAY BACK

Cardiac rehabilitation an important step to health after heart attack

BY LISA CRAWFORD WATSON



MONTAGE EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGISTS JOE YEARY, LEFT, AND BEAU BRAND.

MONTEREY RESIDENT Dan Searle was visiting the Pacheco Club with his son, when suddenly Searle collapsed right in front of him. A doctor who happened to be in the next room cared for Searle until an ambulance arrived to take him to Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, where it was confirmed he was having a heart attack.

Within days, Searle underwent open-heart surgery to address blockages in his heart's arteries.

"I went home to recover from the heart attack and resulting surgery," says Searle, "but a couple of weeks later, I had a stroke. I went back to the hospital and spent time in intensive care, followed by rehabilitation services. All in all, I spent almost two months in and out of the hospital."

Before his heart attack, Searle felt healthy and strong. He was active, in good shape, enjoying golf—except secretly his heart was not healthy. After Searle left Community Hospital, he continued his heart-healing journey in the outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation program, located in the Montage Wellness Center in Marina.

There, exercise physiologists Joe Yearly and Beau Brand, along with other clinicians, provide an eight-week program that pairs education with monitored exercise, designed to help the patient incorporate both into a healthy lifestyle. The program can benefit people who have had a heart attack, heart failure, open heart surgery, or angioplasty.

There is a difference between a heart attack and heart failure, explains Yearly. When someone suffers a heart attack, arteries on top of the heart that feed oxygenated blood to the heart muscle are blocked and cause damage to the heart. Unlike sudden cardiac arrest, the heart may not stop beating during a heart attack.

Heart failure is a progressive condition, where the heart cannot supply an adequate volume of oxygenated blood to the rest of the body. Heart failure is a chronic disease that requires lifelong management.

"We are a vital step in everything a heart patient goes through to restore and prolong health," Yearly says. "Their journey usually starts in a doctor's office or the ER. Ultimately, they come to us for cardiac rehabilitation so they can have a normal, healthy, active life."

The program begins with an intake assessment to confirm the patient's medical history, heart health, and any other medical conditions and physical limitations they may have. Next is a frank discussion about what the patient wants to get out of this program, how they envision their life going forward, and their goals. Some may want to be able to walk without a walker. Others may want to run the Big Sur Marathon. It's all very individual, Yearly says.

Cardiac rehabilitation is covered by most health insurance plans, and Community Hospital also has a financial assistance program for people who qualify.

"Our education classes cover risk factors for heart disease, how the heart works, heart conditions, procedures, medications and prevention," Yearly says. "Reducing the risk of future heart problems is a big focus of the program, particularly because of the fear often experienced by the patient." The rehabilitation team also includes a registered dietitian, who teaches some the nutrition classes and often sees participants individually.

"We get a wide age range of patients in the program," says Brand. "Most are in their 60s to 80s, but sometimes people are in their 30s or their 90s. As long as they have a referral and can participate in group exercise—they have to be able to transition themselves from a wheelchair or walker to the cardio machines and back—they can benefit from the program."

CONTINUE TO PAGE 22

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During the exercise portion of the program, patients use treadmills, elliptical machines, stationary bikes, an arm ergometer—like a treadmill for the arms—and the ergonomic recumbent NuStep cross trainer, specifically designed for cardiac rehabilitation.

“While patients are exercising, we monitor them closely, review their EKG rhythm, heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, and any signs and symptoms of discomfort,” says Brand. “The most basic principle of exercise training is gradual progression. Even experienced, regular exercisers need to progress gradually and learn how to monitor themselves. The appropriate questions for safe and progressive exercise are: How hard is hard enough, and how hard is too hard.”

When patients start to feel well, they think they can go right back to where they were before in their activity level, says Brand. The point is to talk about where they want to be, educate them about where they are, and then gradually build from there.

Besides setting intention and physical goals, there is an emotional component to coming back from a heart event and getting into a program that will restore or initiate a healthy lifestyle.

“People who have recently had a heart event often carry a certain level of post-traumatic stress,” says Brand. “Experiencing a heart attack or open heart surgery can be very disturbing. A big part of our program is dedicated to helping people get back their confidence to live an upbeat, happy, healthy life.”

Going through a heart attack or surgery tends to make people evaluate their lives, says Yeary. Are they living true to their priorities and values? Have they been putting off until tomorrow what they should address today?

“But tomorrow is now,” he says. “After the program ends, people come back to us and say it was life-changing. It’s nice having a job where almost every patient, when they complete the program and are leaving, wants to give us a hug.”

Dan Searle completed the Cardiac Rehabilitation program, has gone back to golf, and is continuing to exercise on his own at his gym.

“I’ve definitely gotten stronger, and I feel good,” he says. “The Cardiac Rehabilitation program is great, and the staff is terrific. It’s wonderful to have these resources here; it’s like a little family.” ■



“

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OF OUR
PROGRAM IS
DEDICATED
TO HELPING
PEOPLE GET
THEIR
CONFIDENCE
BACK.”

- BEAU BRAND

‘DID THIS REALLY HAPPEN?’

Learning how to thrive after a heart attack

By Lisa Crawford Watson

Wendy Martin took off a week from her civilian job at the police department to install new floors in her Del Rey Oaks home. Taking a break from the hard labor, she went to Chukchansi Gold Resort, where she awoke during the night, feeling a weight on her chest, like a hundred elephants. She returned to sleep.

Two days later, Martin decided she needed to go to the hospital. The weight of the elephants had increased, and she felt nauseous. Turns out she was having a heart attack, the first of two. While at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, she had a second episode.

“When something like that happens,” says Martin, 65, “you have no clue what to make of it. They explained to me that I had a clot in my left artery, and that they’d cleared the artery and put in a stent to keep it open. But it was such a shock; I didn’t even know what questions to ask except, ‘Did this really happen?’”

Martin’s heart attacks were the train that sent her life on a whole new track, and she needed to get on board. She retired from the police department, and enrolled in the Cardiac Rehabilitation program at Montage Wellness in Marina. Dr. James Joye, who specializes in interventional cardiology, referred Martin to the program.

She didn’t know what to expect, except that the 12-week program seemed like forever and an overwhelming proposition. What she did appreciate was exercise physiologist Joe Yeary’s dry sense of humor and encouragement during the intake process.

Martin also appreciated Yeary’s explanation of what she and her heart could expect from the program. She felt like she’d been tossed a lifeline during the storm brewing in her head.

“The first half hour of the class was educational,” she says, “which was priceless. I learned the effects of the food I eat on my health, and what causes high blood pressure. I learned what my prescriptions do for me, to order them ahead of time so I’m never out of them, and the importance of actually taking them.”

The remaining hour of the course was spent exercising. Martin wore a heart monitor, which recorded her heart activity through a computer. Staff took her blood pressure three times during her exercise program, as she moved among the different cardio machines.

“The Cardiac Rehab program woke me up to the need to take care of myself,” she says. “It helped me ask better questions, including what had happened to my heart. Joe explained it, and I got it. Throughout the program, Joe said my face was always fearful. I have to remind my face that everything’s okay.”

As Martin progressed through the program, her anxiety diminished, and she came home after each class, feeling healthier and better able to deal with the fact that she’d had a heart attack.

“It happened,” she says, “but I’ve calmed down about it. I’m more focused on living a balanced life; eating better and exercising an hour a day. Even though we went to Winchell’s today, it’s no longer every day. It was a treat.” ■



Wendy Martin



HEART MONTH 2020

Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare system will observe American Heart Month in February through many Heart Month 2020 activities.

"Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, which is one reason we set aside an entire month for awareness and education opportunities," says Kristina Rusk, director of public relations and system communications at SVMHS. "The good news about heart disease is that everyone can take personal and specific steps to reduce their risk."

"Salinas Valley Memorial is here to support healthy activity and healthy action plans. During February," Rusk says, "we hope people take advantage of our free events."

Here's what being offered:

♥ **Exercise Challenge 2020:** The free four-week program runs from Feb. 3 through March 1. It's designed to promote a healthy lifestyle and encourage people to get regular aerobic exercise. For more information, visit svmhs.com/challenge.

♥ **Ask the Experts:** Heart Health takes place Feb. 20 at California State University, Monterey Bay, Salinas City Center (National Steinbeck Center, 1 Main St.). The reception starts at 5:30 p.m. and the program begins at 6 p.m. For reservations, call (831) 759-1890. The event is free and includes interactive demonstrations and conversations with SVMHS physicians, a healthy cooking demonstration and health and wellness information for the entire family.


♥ **Go Red for Women.** \$5 Red Dress pins will be sold all month, starting Feb. 3 at these locations: Cardiovascular Diagnostic Outpatient Center at 5 Lower Ragsdale in Ryan Ranch; CDOC at 230 San Jose St., Salinas; SVMH Cardiology Department Health Promotion office; Human Resources, Volunteer Services office; and Cardiac Wellness Center. Celebrate National Wear Red Day with Go Red for Woman on Feb. 1 to help fight heart disease, the No. 1 killer of women. Visit www.goredforwomen.org.



♥ **Heart Healthy Menu:** Nutrition and healthy eating habits are the cornerstone to a healthy heart. Check out recipes on the SVMHS website, svmhs.com/heart and Facebook.com/svmhs.

♥ **February Red Hat Campaign:** Every baby born at SVMH in February will go home with a handmade red hat, courtesy of hat making volunteers and the American Heart Association Little Hats Big Heart campaign.

♥ **Mended Hearts:** It's the country's longest running peer-to-peer cardiac support group, offering a unique physician-endorsed support model to help heart patients, families and caregivers. Call 831-755-0772. At 6 p.m. Feb. 18 Dr. Michael Discus will discuss "The Heart-Kidney Connection." The group meets at 450 E. Romie Lane, Salinas, in the Downing Resource Center parking structure, conference rooms B and C. ■



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WELCOME TO WATCHMAN

Implant guards against stroke without need for blood thinners

BY LISA CRAWFORD WATSON



HE WAS TALL, lean, athletic, and 80. Every day, he ate well, exercised, and took a multivitamin plus the prescription blood thinner Coumadin because he had atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that can cause strokes.

Coumadin kept him from having strokes, yet it also contributed to balance problems, causing him to fall. Once, when he was running up the stone steps of his Carmel cottage, he fell, splitting open his head like a watermelon. It took an hour for the ER doctor at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula to stop the bleeding.

He also fell outside the movie theater, in his bathroom, and in the hallway, taking out the windowsill with his head. The last time he lost balance and fell, it was off his balcony. And Dad died.

There's a good chance, had his heart been fitted with a WATCHMAN device, eliminating the need for blood thinning, Dad might still be living a balanced life.

Conventionally, blood thinning has been the mainstay of therapy for addressing nonvalvular atrial fibrillation or AFib, which can increase risk of stroke, heart failure and other heart-related complications. Blood thinners have been necessary because AFib can cause blood clots to develop in the left atrial appendage, a small pouch off the left atrium of the heart. These clots can break off, move into the brain and cause strokes. Blood thinners—anti-coagulants—help keep clots from forming.

Not all patients can tolerate blood thinners. Some may experience gastrointestinal bleeding, find blood in the urine if they have prostate problems, become prone to nose bleeds or, if they cut themselves, be unable to stop the bleeding. Blood thinning is good until it's not, says Dr. Ajanta De, an interventional cardiologist at Community Hospital.

"Newer blood thinners like Eliquis, Xarelto and Pradaxa are easier to administer and do not require as much monitoring as Warfarin/Coumadin," says Dr. De. "Blood thinning is a safe haven from stroke, but when bleeding and fall risks are high, the blood thinning becomes more harmful than protective."

The alternative to blood thinners, for the right candidates, she says, is the WATCHMAN device, a permanent implant about the size of a quarter, designed to seal off the blood flow to the left atrial appendage in the heart, where blood clots start.

"The WATCHMAN procedure is performed through a catheter, which is inserted into the groin and is directed, through the femoral vein, up to the heart and into the left atrium," says Dr. De. "The device is folded into the catheter, through which it is run up into the heart and deployed into the left atrial appendage."

Patients undergo the one-hour procedure, followed by a one-night stay in the hospital, before returning home with minimal recovery time. Over the next six months, cells develop over the device, effectively closing off the left atrial appendage as a barrier to clots. Afterwards, blood thinning is required for six months, and then, daily baby aspirin, lifelong.

"For a patient to be considered for the WATCHMAN device, ultrasound testing is required to evaluate the size of one's left atrial appendage. This is done with a 30-minute ultrasound in the hospital," says Dr. De, "which enables us to gain a sense of the size and shape of the left atrial appendage. Everyone is different, so we pick the right size Watchman, among five sizes."

In addition, cardiologists use the CHA2DS2-VASC scoring system to calculate stroke risk for patients with atrial fibrillation, and determine their eligibility for the WATCHMAN procedure. Factors include age, gender, history of vascular disease and diabetes.

"Because the WATCHMAN device is designed to minimize the long-term incidence of stroke," says Dr. De, "patients in their mid-90s may not be suitable candidates, while patients in their 50s may do sufficiently well on blood thinners. It is important to individualize treatment for AFib patients based on their risk for stroke and risk for complications while on blood thinning agents."

Dr. De has been implanting Watchman left atrial appendage closure since 2017. This year, she and Dr. Steven Fowler, medical director of electrophysiology, will bring the procedure to Community Hospital.

"Before the WATCHMAN procedure, if a patient experienced bleeding while on a blood thinner, or if they needed to undergo some other procedure, we had to stop therapy, leaving them at risk for stroke," says Dr. De. "Now, six months after the WATCHMAN procedure, my patients feel the freedom of not having to be on blood thinners, without being at risk from stroke." ■

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Dr. Pechak with his twin boys



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HEALTHY HEART PROGRAMS

Central Coast YMCA offers education and advice to enhance wellness



CENTRAL COAST YMCA, which serves Monterey, San Benito and South Santa Cruz counties, offers a range of programs meant to improve health and wellness. Now, the Healthy Heart Ambassadors program is helping people with high blood pressure learn more about the condition and how to manage it.

According to the American Heart Association, nearly 80 million adults have high blood pressure in this country, and fewer than half have it under control. The YMCA's Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring Program will encourage participants to take their blood pressure at home and give them the opportunity to attend personalized consultations.

The program is for adults age 18 and up who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, but who have not experienced a recent cardiac event or have atrial fibrillation or other arrhythmias.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE IS A KEY MODIFIABLE RISK FACTOR FOR BOTH HEART DISEASE AND STROKE, WHICH ARE TWO OF THE LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH IN THE UNITED STATES.

Participants will work with trained Healthy Heart Ambassadors for the duration of the four-month program. During this time, participants will be asked to self-measure and record their blood pressure at least two times per month using an easy-to-use, self-tracking tool. The Y will provide options for participants who need a home blood pressure monitor.

Participants can also attend two personalized consultations per month, as well as monthly nutrition education seminars.

Program goals include better blood pressure management, increased awareness of triggers that elevate blood pressure, and developing healthier eating habits.

Also available through Central Coast YMCA is the nationally recognized YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program, an evidence-based program shown to reduce the burden of Type 2 diabetes, one of the nation's costliest chronic diseases.

According to Centers for Disease Control, nearly 26 million Americans have diabetes and a staggering 86 million, or one in three, adults have prediabetes, but only 10 percent are aware of it.

"This is a call to action for people in our community to learn about their own risk for prediabetes and diabetes," said Andy Weighill, president and CEO of Central Coast YMCA. "Adults who are at high risk can turn around their health and reduce their chances of developing the disease if they take action to change their lifestyle. The YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program is proven to help them do just that."

The YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program provides a supportive environment where participants work together in a small group to learn about healthier eating, and increasing their physical activity in order to reduce their risk for developing diabetes. Individuals who participate in the program take part in 16 one-hour weekly classroom sessions with a trained Lifestyle Coach.

Following these sessions, participants meet monthly for up to a year for added support in reaching their ultimate goals of reducing body weight by 7 percent and participating in 150 minutes of physical activity every week.

Formed in 1989, the Central Coast YMCA began with the merger of two independent YMCAs—the Salinas Community YMCA, founded in 1921, and the Watsonville Family YMCA, founded in 1898.

Originally a USO built in 1941, with the purpose of supporting American troops during World War II, the YMCA of the Monterey Peninsula joined the association in 1990. In 1998 the South County YMCA became the fourth branch in the association, extending its service area to the residents of south Monterey County. The YMCA of San Benito County became the fifth and most recent addition to the association in 1999.

CCYMCA is an independent private nonprofit corporation, a part of the YMCA of the USA, but responsible for its own policies, programs, and budgets. It employs 27 full-time employees, about 225 part-time employees, and 120 volunteers who impact approximately 40,000 people in Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey counties.

For more information on Central Coast YMCA, call (831) 757-4633 or go to centralcoastymca.org. CCYMCA is located at 500 Lincoln Ave. in Salinas. ■

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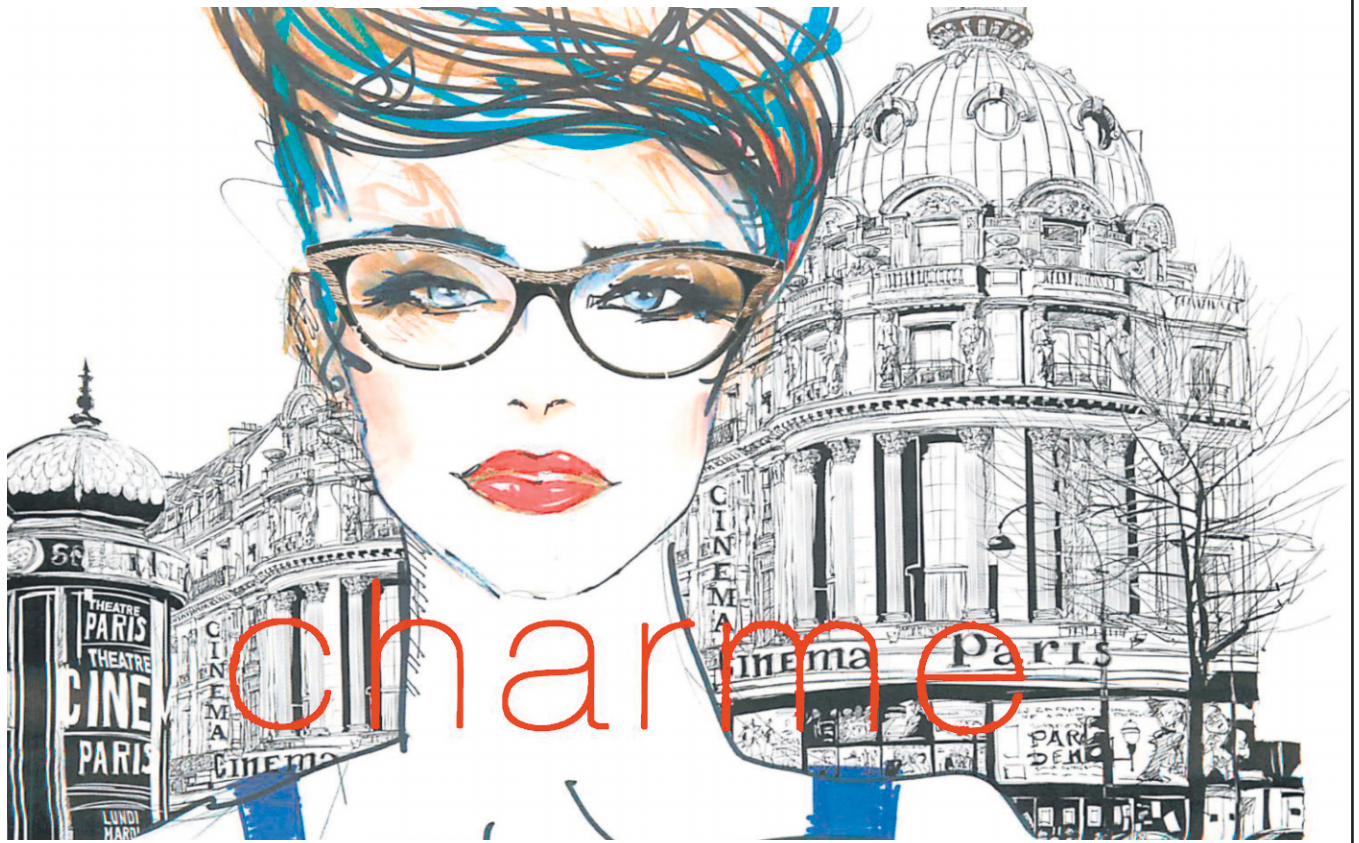
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HEALTH MATTERS

Monterey County's Health Magazine

2020 Topic Schedule

January – New Year's Resolution

Publishes December 28th, 2019

Reserve by: November 25th, 2019

Final Art Deadline: December 2nd, 2019

February - Heart Health

Publishes January 25th, 2020

Reserve by: December 27th, 2019

Final Art Deadline: January 3rd, 2020

March – Beauty & Dental

Publishes February 29th, 2020

Reserve by: January 31st, 2020

Final Art Deadline: February 7th, 2020

April – Senior's Health

Publishes March 28th, 2020

Reserve by: March 2nd, 2020

Final Art Deadline: March 6th, 2020

May – Women's Health

Publishes April 25th, 2020

Reserve by: March 30th, 2020

Final Art Deadline: April 3rd, 2020

June – Men's Health

Publishes May 30th, 2020

Reserve by: May 4th, 2020

Final Art Deadline: May 8th, 2020

July – Medical Profiles

Publishes June 27th, 2020

Reserve by: June 1st, 2020

Final Art Deadline: June 5th, 2020

August – Hearing/Vision/Back-to-School

Publishes July 25th, 2020

Reserve by: June 29th, 2020

Final Art Deadline: July 3rd, 2020

September – 2020/21 Medical Directory

Publishes August 29th, 2020

Reservation by: July 10th, 2020

Final Art Deadline: July 17th, 2020

October – Cancer

Publishes September 26th, 2020

Reserve by: August 31st, 2020

Final Art Deadline: September 4th, 2020

November – Pediatrics/Beauty Inside & Out

Publishes October 31st, 2020

Reserve by: October 2nd, 2020

Final Art Deadline: October 9th, 2020

December – Senior's Health

Publishes November 28th, 2020

Reserve by: October 26th, 2020

Final Art Deadline: November 2nd, 2020

Health Matters is a regional magazine for Monterey County residents, offering information about local health care providers, hospitals, clinics, medical groups, and other matters relating to health and wellness on the Central Coast. Each issue details the latest news on the area's medical community, innovations in health care, and information on healthy lifestyles, fitness and nutrition. Written by experienced columnists and journalists, Health Matters makes it easy to find the health news you need to know.

For more information or to reserve space

Mike O'Bleness

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VNA offers CPR community classes



If performed immediately, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, can double or triple a person's chance of survival by keeping blood and oxygen flowing to the brain and other vital organs. Sadly, this happens less than 10 percent of the time outside of the hospital.

As part of its ongoing mission to provide community health services, VNA Community Services has launched an initiative to train local residents to become educated, confident and capable of responding so that they can save the life of someone in need of CPR.

VNA now offers Basic Life Support for health care providers, and Heartsaver for community members. The BLS course ensures ongoing certification for health care workers, while Heartsaver is appropriate for parents, grandparents, babysitters, teachers, coaches, office staff and anyone interested in saving a life.

BLS is offered the second Thursday each month at VNA, 5 Lower Ragsdale Dr, Monterey. Heartsaver is available on location, or at VNA by arrangement. BLS Blended Instruction costs \$80, while Heartsaver Blended Instruction is \$95. Classes are limited to four to 12 participants. VNA instructors issue American Heart Association certification cards, valid for two years.

For more information, call (831) 648-3703, or visit www.ccvna.com.

Hospice Giving launches end of life campaign

Hospice Giving Foundation understands end of life is a tough topic, yet it is a very important issue that touches everyone. But when given the opportunity, most people do want to talk about it.

To make conversations about end of life easier and more approachable, and to join efforts happening around the country, HG Foundation is launching HOPEGives, a community health movement to shift societal

attitudes about death. By deepening understanding and acceptance, HOPEGives helps individuals and families experience peace of mind through advance planning and compassionate end-of-life care.

To kick off the movement, HG Foundation has hosted several community events in Monterey County to encourage conversations about important end-of-life issues.

HG Foundation believes in living fully and dying peacefully. Its community-based support promotes personal choice, preparedness, and the highest standards of compassionate, dignified end-of-life care for individuals and their loved ones. For more information on end-of-life resources and educational events, visit hospicegiving.org or call (831) 333-9023.

OMNI Center offers activities for 2020

Monterey County's only peer and family run mental health wellness center has put together a busy and diverse calendar of programs and activities to begin the new year.

OMNI Resource Center's peer-led programs provide tools for wellness and recovery as well as recreation and social opportunities. Wellness programs are free with no referral needed, and open to anyone with mental health challenges.

Specific programs are designed to create fun opportunities for young adults ages 18 to 30 where they can learn valuable life skills and develop self-esteem. To begin 2020, OMNI will hold its free After Hours Program for Transitional Youth and Young Adults each Wednesday from 3-5 p.m. at the Interim Inc. Pajaro Street Wellness Center at the corner of E. San Luis and Pajaro streets, Salinas.

Upcoming After Hours highlights include Happy Heart Basketball (Feb. 19), St. Patrick's Day (March 11), along with many more activities. After Hours also offers wireless internet access, computer use, living skills, socialization and snacks. Transportation is provided by calling before 1 p.m.

Each weekday, the center provides adults of all ages with engaging opportunities, including breakfast at the OMNI Cafe, Walk & Talk outings, Whole Health workshops, Creative Expressions art classes, community lunches and more.

OMNI is also planning a Valentine's Day event, the Cupid's Ball, on Feb. 14 at 1 p.m. The ball will be held at Monterey Bay Events Center, 249 10th St., Marina with a live DJ, food and fun.

Also coming up is the Holi Festival of Colors on March 6 at 11:30 a.m. The festival, celebrated on the day after the full moon in the Hindu month of Phalguna, signifies the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring, the end of winter, and a chance to forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships. The festival will be held at OMNI Resource Center. Information: (831) 800-7530 ext. 430.

OMNI is a program of nonprofit Interim Inc. Visit www.interiminc.org. ■

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**Join us for the April issue:
Senior's Health**

Reservation deadline: March 2, 2020

For more information or to reserve space



Mike O'Bleness • 831-726-4355 • mobleness@montereyherald.com

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