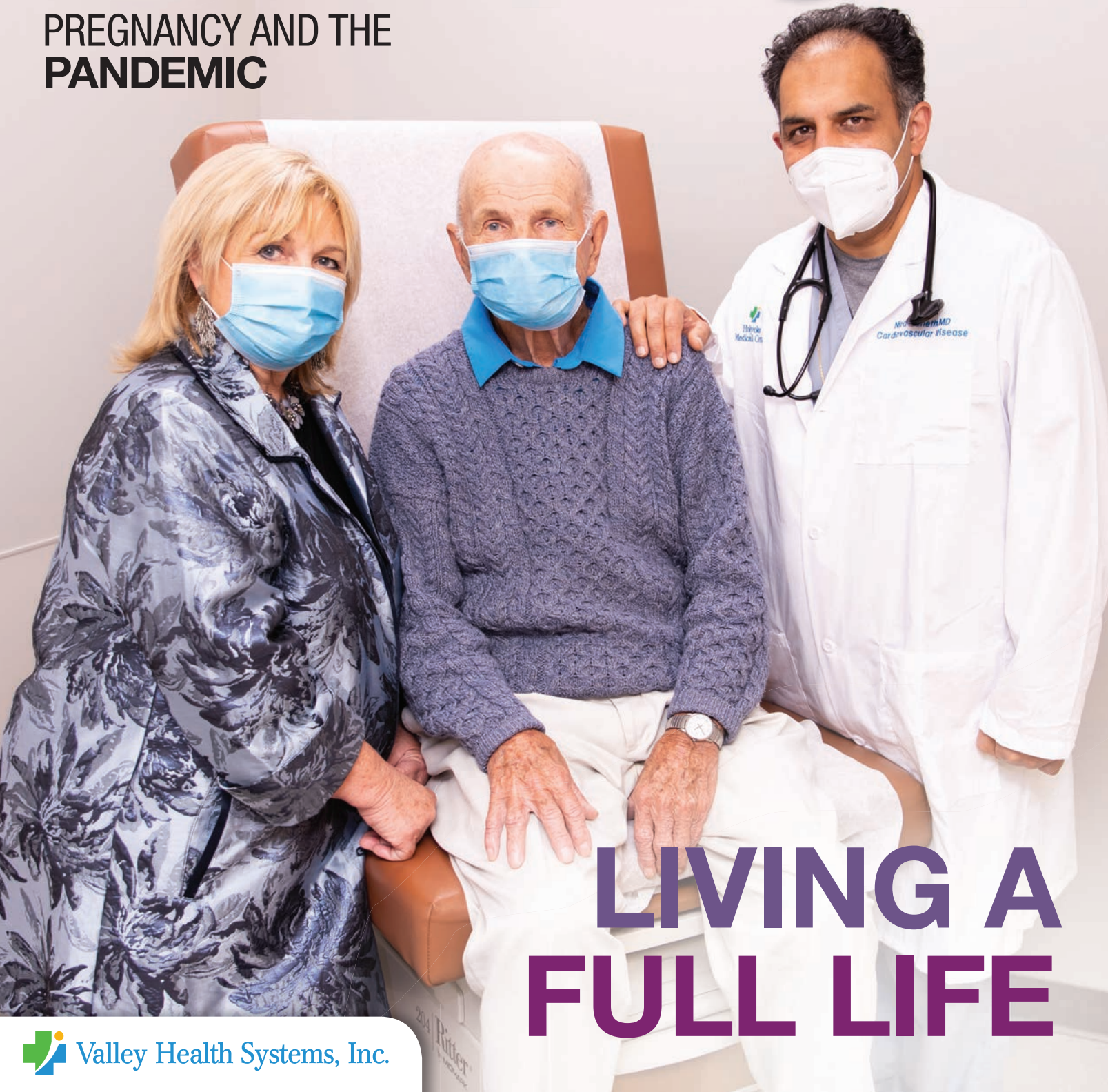


# VALLEY

## health & life

FUNDRAISING **FUN**

PREGNANCY AND THE  
**PANDEMIC**



# LIVING A FULL LIFE



## DEAR FRIENDS OF HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER AND VALLEY HEALTH SYSTEMS,

I hope our Fall issue finds you in good health.

So much has happened this year and it is not over yet. Here at the hospital, we are prepared and ready to face winter and to weather the flu and COVID-19. That said, we are all hoping for a mild season and no new coronavirus wave.

While the pandemic has taken up much of our time and resources, and is continuing to do so, you will see in this issue that a lot of other things are happening at Valley Health Systems.

We have installed and are operating a brand new electronic medical record system. This was a very big and important project for us that started two years ago and ramped up this spring and summer in the middle of the pandemic. Our amazing staff was able to go live as scheduled on October 1st without any major issues. The new state-of-the-art system integrates the outpatient and inpatient information into one unified record and also features a new patient portal.

We have also officially submitted our application to the Department of Health for the construction of the brand new building that will house our behavioral health pavilion. The need for more behavioral health beds in our region is significant, and we feel very strongly that this new pavilion meets a very important need in our community.

Dr. Allison Richards, an experienced hand surgeon has joined our medical team. Her skills add an important service for our community. Patients requiring a hand specialist can now receive their care locally.

Last, but not least, as we celebrate all of our staff, caregivers and support staff, I want to acknowledge our nurses as the year 2020 has been designated the year of the nurse. Since it will be a while before we can hug again, I won't say, "hug a nurse," but I will say that they deserve our appreciation in any way we can show it, such as a card, a thank you, a nice thought or a prayer.



Best wishes,

**SPIROS HATIRAS**  
President and Chief Executive Officer,  
Holyoke Medical Center & Valley Health  
Systems, Inc.



**On the Cover:**  
Patient William Salois  
flanked by his daughter  
Deborah Donovan and  
his cardiologist,  
Nirav Sheth, MD. Read  
his story on page 8.

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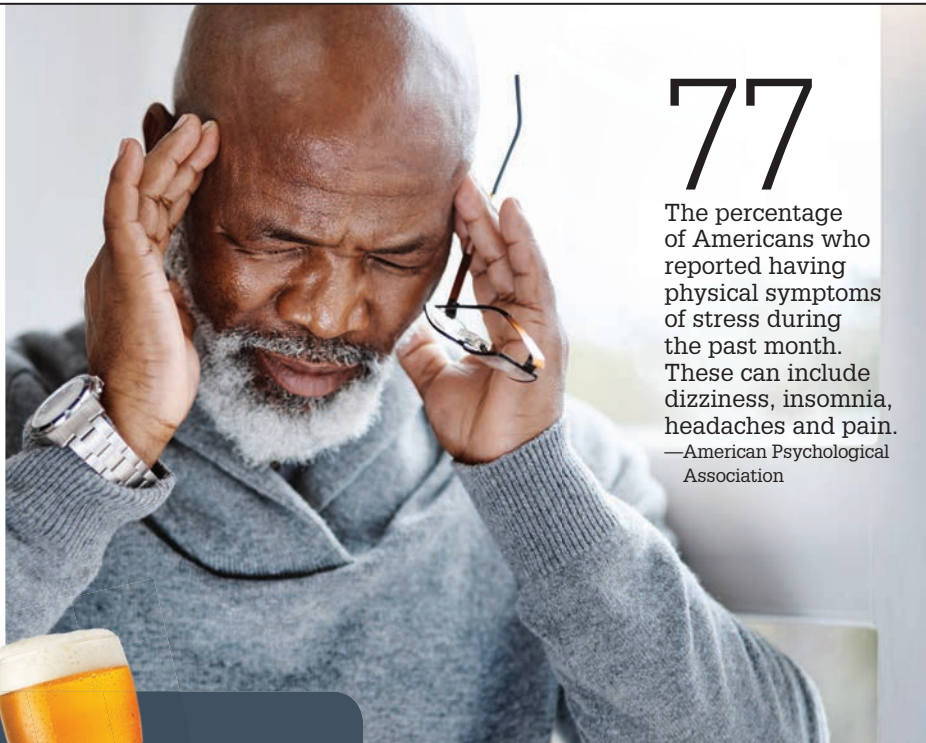
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## Valley Health Systems, Inc.

- **HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER**  
575 Beech Street, Holyoke | 413.534.2500
- **HOLYOKE MEDICAL GROUP**  
15 Hospital Drive, Holyoke | 413.535.4800
- **HOLYOKE VNA HOSPICE LIFE CARE**  
575 Beech Street, Holyoke | 413.534.5691
- **RIVER VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER**  
P.O. Box 791, Holyoke | 413.540.1234

# HEALTHY HABITS

FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY



77

The percentage of Americans who reported having physical symptoms of stress during the past month. These can include dizziness, insomnia, headaches and pain.  
—American Psychological Association



32

The percentage increase in alcohol sales in the U.S. in 2020 for the week of May 2, when the pandemic was well underway, compared to the same week the year before.  
—Nielsen

## EAT EARLY TO SHED POUNDS

Eating 75 percent of your daily calories before 2 p.m. may help you lose weight. Why? Your body is better able to use the food efficiently, avoiding spikes in glucose levels.  
—*Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*

## IUDS AND CANCER RISK

Hormonal intrauterine devices (IUDs), which provide long-term birth control by releasing progestin, may reduce a woman's risk of ovarian cancer by 32 percent, according to new research.  
—*Obstetrics & Gynecology*



## BRUSH AGAINST COVID ISSUES

Why do some patients with COVID-19 suffer more severely? Researchers have concluded that poor oral hygiene may be connected to serious COVID-19 complications, such as pneumonia and acute respiratory distress. The researchers believe that maintaining oral hygiene could reduce the risk of adding bacterial superinfection to the virus.  
—*British Dental Journal*



## TREE OF LOVE

For 2020, Valley Health Systems' Tree of Love is online and interactive! Watch it fill with decorations throughout the holiday season. You can help us decorate our annual Christmas tree in memory of a loved one or to honor someone special. Add a colorful ornament, turn on some twinkling lights, place a present under the tree—you can even add the star to the top of the tree! Check back often—the decorations will multiply with every donation.

You can:

- Write a personal message dedicated to someone special
- Upload a photo of your family, friends or pets
- Share your message on social media

Your support this holiday season truly makes a lasting difference at Holyoke Medical Center. We're helping and healing every day thanks to your generosity. We hope you and your family enjoy this special time of sharing and giving, and that the fun of decorating our online interactive Tree of Love adds to your enjoyment.

Help us trim the tree!

Visit: [visufund.com/treeoflove](https://visufund.com/treeoflove) to make your tax-deductible donation today. If you need assistance while on the site, visit: [visufund.com/help/making-a-donation](https://visufund.com/help/making-a-donation).

Or mail your donation to: Valley Health Systems, Inc. Development Office, 20 Hospital Drive, Holyoke, MA 01040. Include your decoration choice, who you're donating in honor/memory of, and a personal message (optional).





# Fundraising Fun

TWO SOUTH HADLEY YOUNGSTERS, WANTING TO HELP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19, FOUND RESOURCEFUL WAYS TO RAISE MONEY FOR HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER.

Left: Cecily Austin and Travis Lemoine raised \$113 for Holyoke Medical Center, which they presented to President and CEO Spiros Hatiras (center photo). Right: One of the creative ways Cecily and Travis raised funds was by offering painted rocks in exchange for a donation.

**LIKE MANY CHILDREN**, Cecily Austin, age 7, and her friend and next-door neighbor, Travis Lemoine, age 8, have been struggling to make sense of the pandemic. They both miss their usual social activities, from spending time with friends and family to sports.

Travis and Cecily's families agreed to form a COVID-19 "bubble," knowing they were staying home as much as possible and observing other recommended safety measures.

"We've had many family conversations about the pandemic," says Jessica Austin, Cecily's mom. "We've talked about how important it is for hospitals to have the resources they need to care for those who are sick and to keep their staff safe with personal protective equipment."

Still, Cecily's parents were surprised when she showed them a project she had been quietly working on. "It was a sign that said, 'We are helpers! We help the world! Please donate and we will give this money to hospitals to stop COVID-19.'"

"We're in a really hard time with the coronavirus," says Cecily, "and it's making people sick. I knew collecting

money might help people." She enlisted Travis to be her fundraising partner.

Travis wanted to assist the Holyoke veterans who were ill with COVID-19. Cecily wanted to help Holyoke Medical Center, where her aunt, Heather Tierney, is a surgical nurse practitioner. The hospital took in many veterans from the Holyoke Soldiers' Home during the pandemic, so raising money for the hospital was an easy choice.

## CREATIVE BRAINSTORMING

The first fundraising activity the children came up with was collecting and "selling" rocks. "We'd smash some of the rocks to see what was inside," says Travis. "And paint some. A neighbor said we could collect rocks from her yard, and she had some big ones."

The children set up a "rock store" at the end of Cecily's driveway, using an old tea tin as a donations box. "They were giddy when they would see people looking at the rocks, taking one, and sometimes leaving a little money," says Jessica. They created 'Free Rock Friday' to encourage people to stop by and choose a rock to take home.

It became a conversation piece in the neighborhood, and gave the children a sense that they were part of a community.

"After the rock business dried up, they made bracelets," says Kate Lemoine, Travis's mom. Next, they sold lemonade, and later fresh vegetables. "We have a vegetable garden," says Kate, "so the kids took requests and delivered vegetables to neighbors, leaving their orders on their doorsteps."

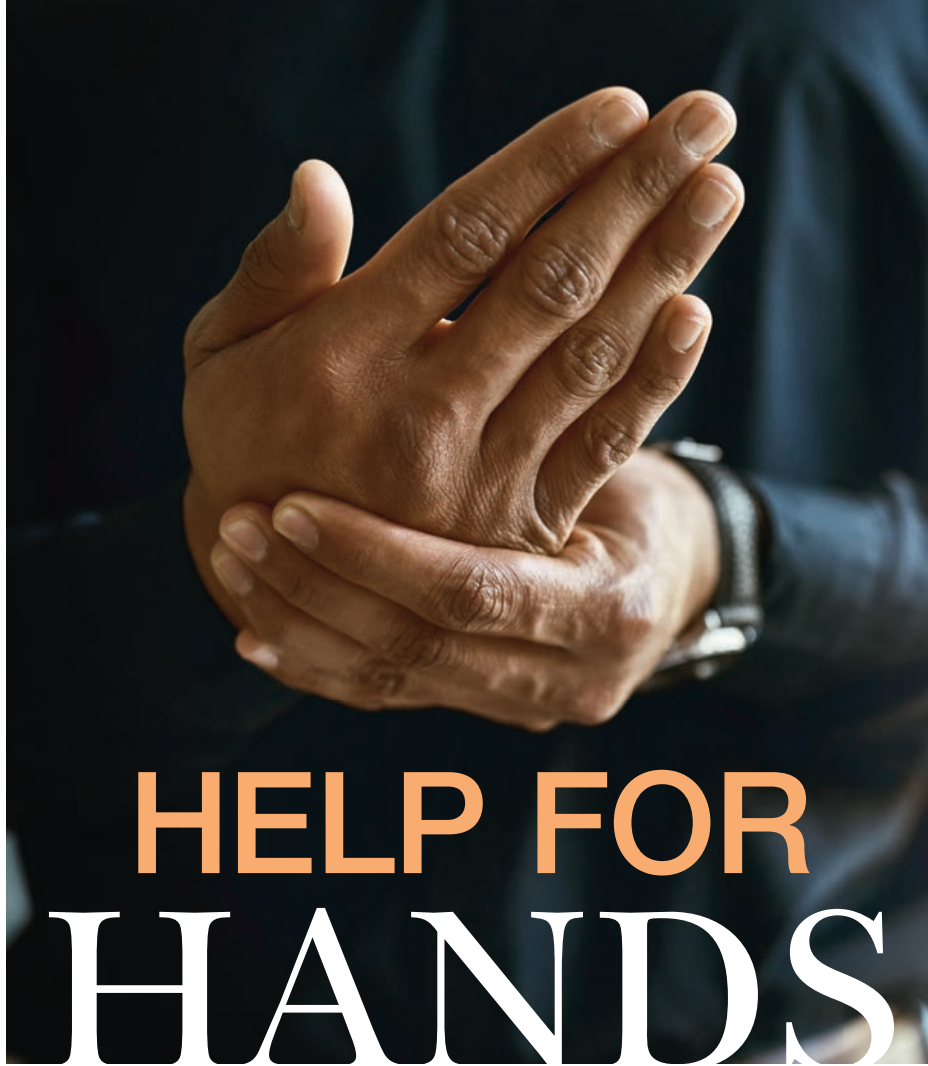
Travis and Cecily's hard work paid off. Over the course of about three weeks in August, they collected \$113. "Our neighbors were incredibly generous," says Jessica, "both with their donations and their support for the kids."

"The donation from Cecily and Travis illustrates just how important and valued every donation is," says Kelly Gloster, Executive Director of Strategic Fund Development. "Cecily and Travis are a true inspiration to us all. Holyoke Medical Center is honored that they chose us as the recipient of their fundraising."

How did the children feel about their efforts? "My heart felt full," says Travis. "I was happy to help out other people."



To join Travis and Cecily by donating to Holyoke Medical Center, visit [www.HolyokeHealth.com/Give](http://www.HolyokeHealth.com/Give) or call 413.534.2579.



# HELP FOR HANDS

AN EXPERT HAND SURGEON JOINS HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER TO TREAT PATIENTS WITH CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME, TRIGGER FINGER AND MUCH MORE.

**FOR ALLISON ALEXANDER RICHARDS, MD**, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, transitioning from the Air Force, where she served as a research engineer for five years, to medicine made perfect sense. “While I enjoyed engineering, I realized I enjoy working directly with people more,” she says. “I like teaching patients about things that will improve their lives. And the mechanical nature of orthopedics seemed natural to me.”



Allison Alexander Richards, MD

Dr. Richards attended Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey. She then completed her residency in orthopedic surgery at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque. Dr. Richards then worked as a general orthopedic surgeon at UNM for five years. During that time, she was drawn to hand surgery and applied for a fellowship in that subspecialty, which she completed in 2008, also at UNM. Dr. Richards is Board-Certified in both Orthopedic Surgery and Surgery of the Hand.

“Hand surgery is a very technical

area, which appeals to me,” she says. “Problems in hand surgery can be very challenging, and also very rewarding when you can help improve someone’s quality of life.”

## COMMON HAND DISORDERS

One surgery that Dr. Richards frequently performs is the carpal tunnel release, which relieves symptoms for patients with carpal tunnel syndrome. This condition can lead to numbness, tingling, weakness, and sometimes pain in the hand and arm. She notes that she sees the best results when carpal tunnel syndrome is identified and treated early, before there is nerve damage.

Another common disorder that Dr. Richards treats is trigger finger, in which a finger can lock or catch in a bent position. It can become quite painful. “No one should have to live with a painful trigger finger,” she says. “It’s one of those conditions we can very often make better, often non-operatively, or with a minor procedure.”

Dr. Richards also treats Dupuytren’s contractures, a condition of thickened tissue that causes some fingers to curl towards the palm. Orthopedic treatment options can provide significant improvement for hand function and quality of life.

Some arthritic conditions also can benefit from injections or operative treatment that Dr. Richards can provide.

She also treats fractures, injuries and other disorders of the hands and wrists in children, adults and seniors.

Dr. Richards says she is very happy to be joining the team at Holyoke Medical Center. “I look forward to getting to know the local physicians, as well my patients,” says Dr. Richards. “I hope to become an active member of the community—something my kids have already jumped into.”

Despite spending the past 22 years in New Mexico, where winter daytime highs don’t go much below 40 degrees, Dr. Richards says she and her family are looking forward to their first New England winter. “We’re a family of skiers, so we like snow,” she says. “Western Mass is going to offer quite a few exciting things for us.”

**\* While many conditions are best seen first by a primary care provider, patients developing numbness and tingling in their hands or locking and catching of their fingers may call directly to be evaluated. HMC Orthopedic Center, 2 Hospital Drive, Suite 203, Holyoke: 413.536.5814.**





# PREGNANCY AND THE PANDEMIC

## SYMPTOMS TO WATCH FOR

Caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors, postpartum depression can have serious consequences, including lower rates of breastfeeding, poorer maternal and infant bonding, and increased likelihood of infants showing developmental delays. While it's somewhat common for women to experience the "baby blues" in the first two weeks after giving birth, any combination of the symptoms below lasting two weeks or more might signal depression.

- Feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Sleeping or eating too little or too much
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Withdrawing from friends and family

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS BROUGHT ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES FOR MANY WOMEN NAVIGATING PREGNANCY AND ADJUSTING TO LIFE AT HOME WITH A NEW BABY.

**AS THE UNITED STATES** continues to battle COVID-19, people are experiencing challenges they never could have imagined, from serious illness and the death of loved ones to job loss, remote learning and social isolation.

Pregnant women and new mothers face additional concerns, including worry about contracting the virus themselves and how it might impact their babies, as well as loss of their usual social support systems during what can be a difficult time, even under normal circumstances.

## COVID-19 AND PREGNANCY

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pregnant women who contract COVID-19 might be at increased risk for severe illness or preterm birth. "However, it's too soon to know for certain the health impacts of COVID-19 on pregnant women or newborns," says obstetrician-gynecologist Marc Zerbe, MD, of Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery. "And each person, pregnant or not, responds to COVID-19 differently."

Dr. Zerbe advises expectant and new mothers to follow these prevention guidelines from the CDC:

- Limit close contact with others as much as possible.
- Wear a mask around anyone outside your immediate household.
- Avoid others who aren't wearing masks.
- Maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others outside your household.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid activities where protective measures can't be taken.
- Don't miss prenatal appointments.
- Get your influenza vaccine.

### IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Before the pandemic, the CDC says that about 13 percent of pregnant women experienced depression during pregnancy or within the first year of giving birth (called perinatal depression). According to a recent study from the University of Alberta in Canada, that number jumped to 40 percent during the time period of the study, April 14 to May 8, 2020.

"We're now seeing a lot more patients who are feeling depressed, vulnerable and lonely," says Brenda Maloney, CNM, a midwife at Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery. "Some mothers with other children at home expected to have help from grandparents, but now they can't because of the higher COVID risk for older people. All of a sudden, they've lost their support system."

Holyoke Medical Center



Brenda Maloney, CNM



Marc Zerbe, MD

✳ To schedule an appointment with one of the doctors or certified nurse midwives at Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery, call **413.534.2826**.



Samantha McVay, MD

### MEET OUR NEWEST OB-GYN

Holyoke Medical Center is pleased to welcome obstetrician-gynecologist Samantha McVay, MD.

A graduate of Boston University School of Medicine, Dr. McVay completed a residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Riverside Regional Medical Center in Newport News, VA, and recently joined Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery. "To me, the most important part of my job is giving my patients the information they need to be empowered to take care of themselves and make decisions about the bodies they're living in," says Dr. McVay.

OB/GYN & Midwifery offers these five coping strategies for all new mothers during COVID-19.

#### • PRACTICE SELF-CARE.

Eat a healthy diet and exercise consistently. Rely on your partner to help with children, or on a trusted family member or friend who's practicing the recommended guidelines to protect themselves from COVID-19. Last but not least, follow the age-old rule for new moms: Sleep when the baby sleeps.

• **FIND WAYS TO CONNECT.** Stay in touch with friends and family outside your household virtually through video calls, at a safe physical distance outdoors, or socially distanced at home wearing masks. Search online for women who blog about motherhood, offering a sense of community as well as practical tips.

• **TALK TO A PROFESSIONAL.** Talk to your OB/GYN, midwife or mental health professional about your symptoms. When needed, counseling sessions often can take place remotely.

• **BE AWARE.** Keep an eye out for unhealthy coping mechanisms, like alcohol or drug use, and speak with your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

• **ASK FOR HELP.** Your healthcare provider can refer you to agencies that offer programs like housing assistance, nutritional help, lactation support, transportation support and more.



### ABOUT US

Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery provides high quality prenatal services, family planning services, gynecology services and postpartum care, conveniently located in the hospital at 575 Beech Street, 5th Floor, in Holyoke.

"We believe in a team approach, and we include patients in the decision-making process," says obstetrician-gynecologist Marc Zerbe, MD, of Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery. "With our objective advice and support, we help our patients make informed choices about the care options that best suit them and their needs."

If you live in Holyoke and need help getting to and from the medical center campus, we offer a free van service from many points within the city. No appointment necessary, available Monday through Friday between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

An additional door-to-door transportation service to Holyoke Medical Center is available by appointment, complimentary and on a first-come-first-served basis, from areas not covered by the above van service. To learn more, call 413.534.2607.



# LIVING A FULL LIFE



William Salois  
flanked by his  
daughter Deborah  
Donovan and his  
cardiologist,  
Nirav Sheth, MD.



## NINETY-FOUR YEARS OLD AND STILL PLAYING GOLF, WILLIAM SALOIS IS GRATEFUL TO THE CARDIOLOGIST WHO HAS HELPED HIM STAY ACTIVE.

**AT AGE 90**, William Salois, a retired firefighter, was still active, meeting friends for breakfast, playing golf twice a week—even going dancing occasionally. But one day in January 2016, his friend Helen noticed that he was having difficulty breathing. She called one of William's daughters, Deborah Donovan, who lives in Scituate, Mass.

Deborah immediately set out for Holyoke, and when she saw her father, told him they needed to get to the emergency room. "He refused to go," she says. "Luckily, he had an appointment with his primary care provider that day, and that doctor immediately sent him to see Dr. Sheth."

"When I first met Bill, he was in acute heart failure," says Nirav Sheth, MD, a cardiologist at Holyoke Medical Center Cardiovascular Specialists. "He had very poor heart function—he was almost in cardiogenic shock, which means his heart couldn't pump enough blood to meet his body's needs."

### A STRUGGLING HEART

William was admitted to the emergency department, where he was diagnosed with severe aortic stenosis—a narrowing of the aortic valve, which sits between the main pumping chamber of the heart and the aorta, the large blood vessel that carries blood to other parts of the body. The valve would need to be replaced.

"At Bill's age, surgical replacement wasn't really an option," says Dr. Sheth. "Fortunately, a relatively new lower-risk procedure, transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), allows older patients—many past 90—to have valve replacements."

Only hospitals that see a high volume of patients with aortic valve stenosis can offer TAVR. Deborah wanted her father to have the procedure in Boston, so he'd be close to her. "Dr. Sheth helped me get him transferred to a hospital in Boston," she says.

"My job there was to get people to pay attention to the patient—not to make judgments based on his date of birth," says Deborah. "Dr. Sheth is really good about that. But in Boston, he was at a teaching hospital, so all these people would come in and ask Dad questions. He'd answer truthfully: 'When I was

out dancing with my girlfriend, I noticed I didn't have my usual stamina.' Everyone thought he was joking and would look to me for an answer, but it was true."

### AN IMPRESSIVE RECOVERY

Two days after the procedure, William went home. "A month later," says Dr. Sheth, "Bill came walking into my office. What impresses me is how quickly he regained his functional status."

In January 2017, during a checkup, Dr. Sheth determined that William's heart rate was slow and referred him to a thoracic surgeon for evaluation, which led to William having a pacemaker placed. "Now I see Bill about every six months to make sure he doesn't have any cardiac issues," says Dr. Sheth. "We do echocardiograms to check his valves and discuss the medications he's taking. His cardiomyopathy, slow heart beat and chronic heart failure have all improved significantly."

William is grateful for the excellent care he has received. "If it weren't for Dr. Sheth," he says, "I wouldn't be here today. When I go to his office, I feel relaxed. He doesn't talk at me or around me, he talks to me. He takes time."

Deborah agrees. "Dr. Sheth basically saved my father's life. When we first met Dr. Sheth, I never thought my dad would last through the night—it was that bad. But Dr. Sheth was his quarterback. He called the plays, and they were spot on."

Father and daughter both appreciate Dr. Sheth's bedside manner. "He's so respectful and responsive, remembering the little things my father told him last visit," says Deborah. "He always asks my father questions first. He might check something with me, but he always asks my father for permission: 'Is it OK, Bill, if I talk to your daughter about this?'"

Now 94, William still enjoys an active life, including a weekly golf game. "One of my jobs," says Dr. Sheth, "is to help patients return to their highest functional capacity as soon as possible so they can enjoy life."

"I think Dr. Sheth is the greatest doctor," says William. "I feel great. I'm still here. I'm happy that I can get up in the morning, greet the day and spend it my way."

✱ **Dr. Sheth's office is located at the HMC Cardiovascular Specialist office, 11 Hospital Drive, 3rd Floor, Holyoke. To make an appointment, call 413.534.2870.**



# IMPROVING THE SPEED OF CARE

A NEW ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORD SYSTEM IMPROVES THE EFFICIENCY AND CONVENIENCE OF CARE, GIVING DOCTORS MORE TIME TO FOCUS ON PATIENTS.

**HOLYOKE MEDICAL** Center and its affiliates have welcomed a consolidated electronic medical record (EMR) into the family. Much as the birth of a child is preceded by planning and mounting anticipation, this change comes after two years of preparation. Research has included: a study of different EMR platforms; on-site demonstrations; analysis of how different systems would meet the needs of the hospital and its patients; and input from physicians across the





Todd McDermott



John Mazzucco, MD



Theodore Mlapah, MD

advantage of features such as clinical-decision support, a system that safeguards against allergic reactions, and another that flags possibly harmful drug interactions.

Overall, the new system helps providers offer more streamlined patient care—a feature physicians are excited about. “I remember the days when our medical records were a sheet

making process, which also considered what it would take to implement each option, as well as cost. After this robust evaluation process and careful consideration, the decision was made to go with Meditech Expanse.

### A GAME CHANGER

The new EMR is a game changer in a number of ways, including how efficiently care can be delivered. Previously, Holyoke Medical Center and its affiliates used multiple EMR systems—one for emergency care, one for ambulatory care and one for inpatient care—which made it time consuming to gain a wholistic view of a patient's health. Having a single system means doctors can more easily see information about all the care a patient has received via a single point of access.

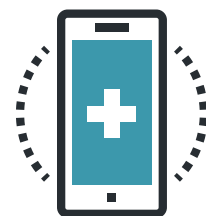
For patients, using one system with a single patient portal makes it possible to review all of their HMC medical and billing records with one login, regardless of where that care was received. Patients are able to see results of diagnostic and lab tests, and review previous appointments. Eventually, the new platform will present options for Telehealth visits; push timely reminders to patients about annual examinations and screenings; allow patients to request appointments; and offer a way to communicate with providers.

Another benefit: This new web-based EMR is more mobile. Whether providers are at the bedside, in the emergency room or in the office, they have ready access to the most current patient information. They also are able to take

of paper with handwritten notes,” says John Mazzucco, MD, a general surgeon at Holyoke Medical Center. “With the new system, everything is done almost seamlessly. Documentation, physicians’ notes, X-ray studies—it’s all just a click away.”

Theodore Mlapah, MD, a hospitalist at Holyoke Medical Center, says the unified system fosters even higher levels of patient safety and care. “For example, sometimes, patients don’t remember their medications. It takes a lot of effort to contact the other medical offices and reconcile what medications the patient is taking.” He points out that, instead of spending time tracking down information from several EMR sources or other medical offices while caring for patients, providers have more time to focus on the patients themselves. “Providers are able to navigate patient records quickly and spend more time providing patient care.”

While the much-anticipated move to one EMR and patient portal has been exciting, McDermott acknowledges that it will take time to get all the capabilities Meditech Expanse has to offer up and running. “Any time you implement an EMR, it takes some time to leverage all of the benefits,” he says. “Before, we were on a legacy system, a platform that really wasn’t being enhanced, other than for regulatory reasons. The new system is a more modern platform that lets us incorporate some of the latest technology into our EMR, improving patient care and convenience.”



Holyoke Medical Center system.

“We evaluated several different EMR providers,” says Director of IT Todd McDermott. “And we visited hospitals that are using the different EMRs to understand the benefits and drawbacks of each. We also surveyed our staff and providers after they attended the demos to find out what they liked about the different EMRs, and what they felt were the benefits and drawbacks of each.”

The next step was to incorporate that research and feedback into the decision-

**\* To access the Patient Portal, please visit [www.HolyokeHealth.com/Portal](http://www.HolyokeHealth.com/Portal).**



# THE YEAR OF THE NURSE

THOUGH THE PANDEMIC PUT YEAR-OF-THE-NURSE CELEBRATIONS ON HOLD, 2020 HAS MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW THE CALL TO NURSING.

**IN 2019**, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that 2020 would be The Year of the Nurse. The celebration was planned to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, founder of modern nursing. It would be an effort to mark the challenges faced and contributions made by the estimated 20.7 million nurses worldwide who practice this noble calling.

Holyoke Medical Center planned to mark the year with tokens of appreciation and special events to celebrate the resiliency and mindfulness of its hardworking nurses.

But in early 2020, the WHO began to closely monitor the outbreak of a virus whose characteristics seemed difficult to understand—one that was rendering some of the people who contracted it very seriously ill. On January 30, 2020, the WHO's Director-General deemed



the outbreak of novel coronavirus a “public health emergency of international concern.” Fewer than two months later, the coronavirus was declared a pandemic.

It seemed The Year of the Nurse would have to be put on hold. And, while Holyoke Medical Center’s special events to commemorate the year were postponed, it quickly became clear to Chief Nursing Officer Colleen Desai, MBA, MSN, RN, CEN, that The Year of the Nurse truly had just begun.

## FOLLOW THE LEADERS

“During the pandemic,” Desai says, “the nurses showed up. Every day. And they were strong, with such a can-do attitude. They really formed a very, very, very solid foundation for everyone.”

The strength shown by the nursing staff as they forged ahead to do what was necessary showed others that it was possible to safely care for patients. “Nursing took the lead in so many ways,” says Desai. “Nothing was above them, nothing was beneath them—they just took charge.”

Nurses transformed into phlebotomists, quickly learning the technical skill necessary to perform blood draws. They became make-shift housekeepers, cleaning and sanitizing rooms. They assisted the kitchen staff by delivering patient meals.

“They didn’t allow any barriers,” says Desai. “They did what they needed to do—with smiles, behind their personal

protective equipment. They never wavered. I’m just so proud of them. Their creativity was amazing.”

To help conserve Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and limit



**Colleen Desai, MBA, MSN, RN, CEN, Chief Nursing Officer**



One smaller recognition event Holyoke Medical Center was able to offer as part of the Year of the Nurse included a nondenominational blessing of the hands (left). Sara Marcy, MSN, BSN, BA, RN, RNC-Obstetrics, filled her office with gift bags distributed to all Valley Health Systems’ nurses, which included long-sleeved shirts bearing the hospital logo and #2020yearofthenurse down the sleeve (above).

potential risk for additional exposures to the virus, the nurses troubleshooted ways to limit the number of people who needed to enter a COVID-19 patient’s room, while still providing compassionate, expert care.

One solution: The nurses extended the tubing on IV pumps so they could be placed outside patient rooms. That way, if an intravenous fluid needed to be adjusted or changed, the task could be performed outside the room instead of at the patient’s bedside—eliminating the need to don PPE and helping to save precious reserves of items such as face masks, gowns and gloves.

## FILLING IN FOR FAMILY

Colleen witnessed her nursing staff growing attached to the patients who came in, watching them give additional attention and care when family members weren’t able to visit because of distancing guidelines.

And, when it became clear a patient wouldn’t pull through despite receiving the highest level of care, the nurses facilitated phone calls and video

calls with patients’ family members—sometimes, on personal cell phones and on their own time.

“We saw death in numbers we’ve never seen before—I’ve never seen before in 20+ years. The nurses made sure no one ever died alone.”

The simple act of being there for patients, no matter their needs, demonstrates the authentic kindness and compassion Desai has witnessed since coming to Holyoke Medical Center more than three years ago.

“There’s a culture here of warmth,” she says. “It’s something special. The nurses are centered, grounded, wholesome, caring—angels without wings. It really is all about the community and the patients they care for.”

And, while the hospital had to put plans to celebrate The Year of the Nurse on hold, Desai will remember 2020 as the year her nurses used their training to answer the call to step up in a crisis.

“We were ready, we were willing and we prevailed,” she says. “This was the year that we mattered most; the year that we were made for.”

**\* If you would like to share a message of support or thanks to our nurses, please mail to: Nursing Administration, Holyoke Medical Center, 575 Beech Street, Holyoke, MA 01040.**

An artist's rendering of Holyoke Medical Center's planned 68,000-square-foot Behavioral Health Pavilion.



# MOVING MENTAL HEALTH FORWARD

HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER HAS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO ADDRESS THE GROWING NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTHCARE. IT STARTS WITH A NEW, PURPOSE-BUILT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PAVILION.



**THROUGHOUT THE U.S.**, mental health has become a growing concern, with mental illness affecting 18.9 percent of adults, according to the most recent statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health. Serious mental illness, defined as a mental, behavioral or emotional disorder that substantially limits one or more major life activities, affects about 4.5 percent of all U.S. adults.

In Holyoke, a growing need for behavioral health resources mirrors the national trend. In the 2019 fiscal year alone, Holyoke Medical Center documented 10,400 visits to its Emergency Department for behavioral health-related reasons. In July, admissions to the existing inpatient adult unit increased by 35 percent, bringing the occupancy close to 100 percent, and requiring additional behavioral health patients to be roomed in the emergency department.

To help meet the growing community need, Holyoke Medical Center has planned a 68,000-square-foot Behavioral Health Pavilion. The new facility will increase the hospital's inpatient care capacity and help bridge the gap between inpatient and outpatient services.

"Expanding from 20 beds to 84 beds is going to make a tremendous difference for our patients," says Carl Cameron, Chief Operating Officer at Holyoke Medical Center. "It's going to be a state-of-the-art building that will help us revolutionize behavioral health care and also build a stronger continuum of care." Of the 84 beds, 36 will be utilized for patients 65 years of age and older, while the remaining 48 will be for adults ages 18 to 64.

## THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

What's behind the growing demand for mental health services? Peter Ulasewicz, Corporate Director of Behavioral Health at Holyoke Medical Center, says that while COVID-19 has contributed to increased anxiety and depression, the changing dynamic of life over the last two decades has played a larger part in today's need for more robust behavioral health services.

"There is no question that over time, society has grown increasingly complex in the manner people live their daily lives," says Ulasewicz. That growing complexity, coupled with

a societal shift in how people interact with one another, can contribute to increased anxiety and depression.

"Right now, from a very early age people are linked to technology, whether it's social media or internet gaming," says Ulasewicz. "It's clear there's been a shift in how we socialize, form meaningful friendships and develop important support systems. I think we have seen a sort of erosion of the opportunities that allow us to form strong interpersonal bonds with others, even from a young age. When you are already grappling with a mental health issue, it's easy to feel even more alienated or alone in the absence of having friends and family we know we can count on for support."

## CATERING TO PATIENT NEEDS

Ulasewicz notes that the building's planned design will cater to the unique needs of behavioral-health patients. "This is going to be a purpose-built structure; it will be designed with the safety and mobility of patients at the forefront," he says. He explains that at many medical/surgical hospital behavioral health units, the spaces where care is provided have been retrofitted for basic needs—a process that produces rooms that are closed and clinical. "This is going to be a bright space that allows a great deal of sunlight," says Ulasewicz. "It's going to allow patients a great deal of physical mobility, while still being a safe, secure environment."

The facility also will provide an outdoor courtyard for patients, and offer space for activities, such as exercise and meditation, to complement talk therapy, medication and other traditional treatment methods. Tedd Ackerman, MD, a behavioral health physician, says that planning the building from the ground up will allow providers to treat patients in spaces that better support the healing process.

"Giving patients and staff a space that will support less industrialized care—a specially designed space to allow outdoor light in and be less cramped—will create an environment that's much more conducive to healing," he says.

While the building is the current focus, Cameron says it's just one part of a comprehensive plan to address the behavioral-health needs of the community. "This is one piece of the strategy," he explains. "Our plan is so much larger than a building. I think we all know there's a stigma out there about behavioral health. We're trying to make sure we move beyond that stigma and have the right programs in place."



Tedd Ackerman, MD



Carl Cameron, Chief Operating Officer



Peter Ulasewicz

**\* If you need behavioral health assistance, call the HMC Care Team at 413.534.2627.**



# Thank You to Our Award-Winning Team!



## Setting the Standard in Care.

We know how great our team is at Holyoke Medical Center. But it's good to know that experts in our industry think they're outstanding, too.



### Healthcare Heroes Award

A program of BusinessWest and Healthcare News for the entire organization's response, under the leadership of Spiros Hatiras, in supporting the Holyoke Soldiers' Home.



### What's Right in Healthcare

Huron | Studer Group 2020 Healthcare Hero Award presented to President & CEO, Spiros Hatiras, for HMC's quick response in supporting the Holyoke Soldiers' Home.



### Superior Stroke Care

Four national and state awards including Get With The Guidelines®-Stroke Gold Plus, Target: Stroke Elite Plus, & Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll Award (American Heart/Stroke Association).



### Let Life Bloom

Platinum Award for Promoting Organ, Eye, And Tissue Donation in the hospital and in our community from Health Resources & Services Administration/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



### ISO Certification

HMC is the first and only hospital in Western Mass to obtain this prestigious accomplishment for committing to quality, transparency, and patient satisfaction by DNV GL - Business Assurance.