



# VALLEY

health & life

QUALITY CARE  
**IN WESTFIELD**

A NEW SPACE FOR  
**SPECIALIZED  
SCREENINGS**

**ARTHRITIS  
RELIEF**



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

**SPRING IS IN THE AIR** and so is a slow but steady return to normal life. I hope all of you are starting to enjoy some time outdoors and perhaps some time with loved ones you have missed during the tough months of the pandemic.

Here at the hospital and health system, we are working hard to assist many of you with the routine, and some not so routine, health matters postponed during the months of isolation. I want to stress the importance of not neglecting preventive, diagnostic or other types of care and personally assure you that we take every measure possible to provide services safely.

Speaking about safety, we are very pleased that Holyoke Medical Center, once again, received the top grade of "A" in safety from Leapfrog. While the standards continue to evolve, and in most cases become more stringent each time we are evaluated, our teams continue to perform exceptionally and to earn the well-deserved top grade.

Along the lines of distinctions, our Bariatric Surgery service, in addition to having been recognized as a "Center of Excellence," received the "Blue Distinction Plus" designation from Blue Cross and Blue Shield for excellence in quality and efficiency.

We are also continuing to advance our first-rate orthopedic service. In this issue, we feature joint replacements, and a future issue will focus on our newest specialty, hand surgery.

Many new things are happening in our system. We opened two new behavioral health units in response to not only increased demand, but also a significant drop in bed availability, especially in Western Massachusetts. We have also built a state-of-the-art cardiac testing area on the ground floor of our main hospital building. This brand-new facility was made possible in part due to a very generous gift from our long-standing benefactor, Mrs. Barbara Bernard. We extend our most sincere thanks to Barbara and her family for their ongoing support of our hospital and health system.

I want to wish all of you a very happy, healthy and joyful summer, which is very much needed by all of us.

Sincerely,

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



**On the Cover:**  
After two knee replacements, Richard Cerruti enjoys being active again. Read the story on page 3.

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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

## EXERCISE YOUR MEMORY

Adults who do aerobic exercise are more likely to improve memory scores—by 47 percent—than those who do strengthening exercises. Researchers posit that aerobics increases blood flow to the hippocampus, which may help protect against memory loss.

—*Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*



# 27

The percentage of Americans who are up-to-date on their Tdap immunization, which protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis.

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



## SCHEDULE SLEEP

Folks with irregular sleep hours had nearly twice the risk of heart attack or stroke as those whose shut-eye was more regular. Strive for six to eight hours a night for optimum health.

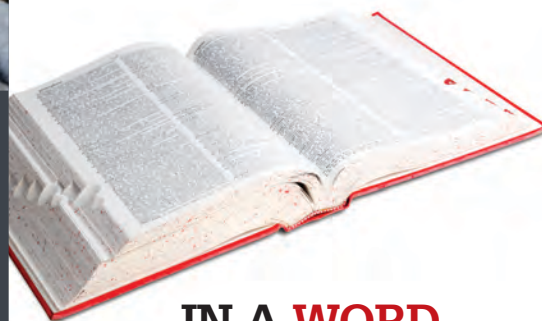
—*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*



## IN A WORD

While it was believed that adults had the strongest vocabulary skills in their 40s, a recent study found that they continue improving their vocabulary into their 70s.

—*Psychological Science*



## NEWS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### DONOR REPORT AVAILABLE

The Valley Health Systems Donor Report for 2019 and 2020 is available at [holyokehealth.com/give-now](https://holyokehealth.com/give-now) to download. The report features stories, accomplishments and the generosity shown in so many ways during the past two years. Read about the highlights, including:

- 2019 Annual Gala and Ace Awards
- The many gifts-in-kind received during the pandemic
- Caring for the Soldiers' Home veterans
- River Valley Counseling Center's golf tournaments
- Holyoke VNA & Hospice Life Care events
- The many generous donors of 2019 and 2020
- HMC's wonderful volunteers

### SAVE THE DATE!

We hope to see you this year at the Holyoke Medical Center Annual Gala! Preparations have begun for November 20, 2021, at The Log Cabin. Please save the date! We're closely monitoring CDC guidelines and state regulations and plan to make any adjustments needed to keep everyone safe. Additional information will follow in the coming months, and we look forward to gathering together once again to support Valley Health Systems.

For more information about the Donor Report and the Gala, please contact the Development Office at **413.534.2579** or email [development@holyokehealth.com](mailto:development@holyokehealth.com).



# ARTHRITIS:

## STOP ACHING AND START MOVING

JOINT REPLACEMENT CAN ALLEVIATE HIP AND KNEE PAIN FOR ADULTS OF ALL AGES, HELPING THEM GET BACK TO DOING THE THINGS THEY LOVE.

**FOR YEARS**, Richard Cerruti of Holyoke has walked at a brisk pace, completing his favorite three-mile trek down Northampton Street in 50 minutes. When the 72-year-old retired postal worker felt his achy right knee give way during his morning walk, Richard knew he had to take action.

He made an appointment with Noah Epstein, MD, an orthopedic surgeon with the Orthopedic Center at Holyoke Medical Center who had treated Richard's shoulder pain in the past. "Dr. Epstein ordered X-rays of both knees, which showed I have osteoarthritis," says Richard.

"Arthritis often causes pain, swelling and stiffness, and limits the range of motion of a person's joints," says Dr. Epstein. "The deterioration of cartilage due to arthritis in the joints can cause the bones to touch and grind, leading to pain."

Dr. Epstein initially took a conservative approach with Richard, prescribing anti-inflammatory medications and physical therapy at CORE Physical Therapy. He also gave Richard a corticosteroid injection. "Richard wanted to be more active," says Dr. Epstein. "When the injections, therapy

Two knee replacements have enabled Richard Cerruti to enjoy the activities he loves again.



and activity modifications weren't helping him regain his full mobility, I recommended a total knee replacement."

### TWO NEW KNEES

Richard met with Orthopedic Nurse Navigator Caroline White, RN, BSN, who provided information about the procedure, which would replace the damaged knee joint with an artificial prosthesis. "I support patients throughout the process and optimize them for surgery," says White. This means assessing medical co-morbidities, assisting with insurance



Michael Marion was able to return to work at the excavating company he owns after a hip replacement.

immediately and leads to better outcomes.” Richard had such a smooth experience with his 2019 knee replacement that he opted to have his second knee replaced 11 months later.

Like the first procedure, Richard returned home using a walker and received home physical therapy. “I went to CORE for outpatient PT,” he says. Richard is now walking two miles a day and looks forward to picking up his speed and his distance in the months ahead.

## HIP REPLACEMENT AT 55

Michael Marion, 55, of Granby had similarly positive results following a total hip replacement in March 2021. The owner of Marion Excavating Company spent his career operating heavy equipment and jumping in and out of trenches. “My occupation did a number on my hip joints,” says Michael, who had shooting pain down his left leg, which affected his sleep and limited range of motion that impacted walking and his ability to put on shoes.

After physical therapy, chiropractic, steroid injections and activity modifications failed to provide a long-term solution, Michael decided upon a total hip replacement at the advice of Khaled Instrum, MD, an orthopedic surgeon with the Orthopedic Center at Holyoke Medical Center.

“Total hip arthroplasties were designed for people aged 65 and older,” says Dr. Instrum. “But if hip pain impacts a person’s ability to participate in daily life and nonoperative management has failed, they become a candidate for a joint replacement.” Dr. Instrum says that improvements in prosthetic components, surgical techniques and the rehabilitation process have made hip surgery a viable option for younger people.

## NO MORE PAIN

Michael, whose diagnosis was osteoarthritis, became one of 450,000 Americans who get a “new hip” each year, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Dr. Instrum used an anterolateral surgical approach, which reduced the risk of dislocation. “Michael has done quite well,” says Dr. Instrum. “He had very little pain after surgery and went home the following day.”

Moving quickly from a walker to a cane, Michael attended outpatient physical therapy at CORE. One month after surgery, he put his cane away and returned to the office. Though Michael is sitting behind a desk for now, he knows he’ll soon be at the wheel of an excavator or bulldozer.

He credits the Orthopedic Center at Holyoke Medical Center with a “phenomenal experience” and says: “Dr. Instrum and Caroline kept me apprised of everything I needed to do every step of the way, making the journey simple. It was nice having a surgeon I could trust so close to home. Why would anyone go anywhere else?!”



Noah Epstein, MD



Khaled Instrum, MD



Caroline White, RN, BSN

✳ The HMC Orthopedic Center is located at 10 Hospital Drive, Suite 203, Holyoke. To make an appointment, please call **413.536.5814**.





# A NEW SPACE FOR SPECIALIZED TESTING

WITH HELP FROM A LONGTIME DONOR, BARBARA BERNARD, HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER BUILDS A BRAND NEW CARDIAC AND NEUROLOGIC TESTING SUITE.

**WHEN A NEARBY** behavioral health center closed last year and its patients turned to Holyoke Medical Center (HMC) in need of care, leaders and staff knew changes would be needed to accommodate them. Already, psychiatry services in the region were strained by an aging population. Fortunately, flexibility and ingenuity are in ample supply at HMC.

The decision was made to dedicate two areas of the hospital to Behavioral Health with one specifically for Geriatric Psych, which meant other departments currently in these areas would have to be moved. One of those departments was the Cardiac and Neurologic Testing Suite, which offers extensive services to diagnose and assess heart and brain conditions. Thanks in part to a generous donation from frequent benefactor Barbara C. Bernard, the hospital was able to upgrade the department as part of the move, building a brand-new 2,500-square-foot dedicated space on the first floor of the hospital.

"This move solved more than one problem," says Robert Castor, manager of the testing suite. "We opened more beds for behavioral health and geriatric psychiatry patients and, at the same time, we were able to upgrade our cardiac/neurologic testing suite."

## UPDATES ALL AROUND

Not only was the testing equipment updated, but also the entire space got a complete makeover—fresh paint, new cabinets and new floors.

There are three echocardiogram rooms, one with a treadmill for stress



Robert Castor



Dorothy St. Germain

echoes, which use sound waves to produce images of the heart. The Stress Testing Lab also offers exercise stress and nuclear stress testing, as well as Holter monitor testing. In Holter monitoring, electrocardiography leads are placed on the chest and the patient wears a portable monitor for 24 to 48 hours.

There are two neurology rooms, one performing nerve conductions and electromyography, and the other performing electroencephalograms (EEGs), which record electrical activity in the brain. Ambulatory EEGs also are offered. With ambulatory

EEGs, a cap containing EEG leads is placed on the head and a digital recorder monitors brain activity over 24 to 72 hours.

Picking up and moving an entire technical department is no easy task, but Cardiology and Neurology Supervisor Dorothy St. Germain says the staff handled it well.

"It was hectic there for a while," she says. "And we continue to make adjustments, but we still offer the same outstanding service we always have."

"Moving the department was a lot of work," agrees Castor, "but it was worth it. Our doctors are pleased with the changes we've made, and we're able to provide everything our patients need."

## ALWAYS READY TO HELP



Barbara C. Bernard

Spend time with Barbara C. Bernard, one of HMC's most prolific donors, and she'll tell you her life is blessed. Spend more time and you'll learn that, while blessed she may be, much of her good fortune is due to her own hard work, and through that hard work, she has generously blessed the lives of many others.

Barbara says giving of herself has been a lifelong habit. When she was young and had little money, she gave her time to found and help operate the Holyoke Golden Age Club, the first independent senior club of its kind in the United States.

As her career as a writer and radio and television host took off, she began making contributions to her community. One of her best opportunities, she says, was to help support disadvantaged young girls, two of whom—now a pediatrician and a nun—she still keeps in touch with.

Now, with her children and grandchildren taken care of, she's quick to help where she feels needed. HMC, she says, is one of her favorite places to donate.

"I absolutely am so grateful to live in this small town, with such a magnificent hospital. It's really well run, and I'm so pleased with Spiros [Hatiras, President and CEO]. He gets things done."

Her most recent donation helped relocate the Cardiac and Neurologic Testing Suite (see main article), which now has all updated equipment and a new, modern look. She was happy to contribute.

"My life has been so blessed," she says. "I'm just happy to help out. Whenever the hospital needs something I want to be there. And it's fun, you know, to be able to do it while I'm still alive and able to see what we've done!"

**\* To make a donation or learn more about how you could support Holyoke Medical Center, please call our Development Office at 413.534.2579.**

**\* The Cardiac and Neurologic Testing Suite is located on the first floor of Holyoke Medical Center. To learn more about the services available and referrals needed, please call 413.534.2538.**





# HEALTH SCREENINGS FOR LIFE

YOUR GUIDE TO STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR HEALTH—  
EVEN IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC.

**VACCINATION AGAINST** COVID-19 is becoming more widespread, and prevention of the disease is better



Thomas Graziano, MD

understood than ever. But preventing other diseases, or catching them early when they're most treatable, has fallen behind during the pandemic.

"Many

people have been neglecting to get appropriate screenings out of fear of contracting COVID-19," says Thomas Graziano, MD, a family medicine physician with Holyoke Medical Group. "As a result, we're seeing illnesses at later stages than we normally would, which can make them harder to treat."

Holyoke Medical Center and Holyoke Medical Group have put measures in place to protect patients from COVID-19, making it safe to come in for screening tests and exams. "If you've delayed routine screenings, now is the time to ask your doctor about them," says Dr. Graziano.

"The frequency of medical screenings depends on individual health histories, but there are national guidelines that give us starting points based on outcomes data."

We've assembled this guide to important preventive screenings that can safeguard your health throughout all of life's stages.

## AGE 18 TO 39

- Blood pressure screening for heart conditions—yearly
- Cholesterol (lipid) blood tests—every five years if normal, yearly if risk factors
- Skin check for skin cancer—yearly





“If you haven’t seen your primary care doctor since the pandemic began, I recommend making an appointment. Catching problems early gives us more treatment options and usually improves outcomes.”

Thomas Graziano, MD

- Breast exam for suspicious lumps—yearly (women)
- Testicular exam for testicular cancer—yearly (men)
- Thyroid-stimulating hormone test (TSH) for underactive or overactive thyroid—if symptomatic
- Cervical cancer screening—every three years (women)
- Pap test—at age 21 and every three

- years if normal (women)
- HPV (human papillomavirus) test—every five years
- Infectious disease screening—yearly
- Flu vaccine—yearly

### AGE 40 TO 64

Continue the screenings in the 18 to 39 age group as recommended by your physician and begin these:

- Mammogram for signs of breast cancer—yearly. At an earlier age if high risk (women)
- Ovarian cancer screening—every three years if high risk (women)
- Prostate-specific (PSA) blood test and/or a digital rectal exam—at age 50 and every two to four years. At an earlier age if high risk (men)
- Colorectal cancer screening at age 45—with stool test every year or with colonoscopy every five years
- Lung cancer screening with LDCT scans if over age 55 and have a history of smoking—yearly
- Blood glucose test for type 2 diabetes—every three years. At an earlier age if high risk
- Onetime shingles vaccine

### AGE 65 AND OLDER

Continue the screenings in the 18 to 64 age groups as recommended by your physician and begin these:

- Bone density study (DEXA scan)—every two to five years. At an earlier age than 65 if high risk
- Onetime abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening for men 65 to 75 with a smoking history
- Annual hearing exam
- Annual screening for Alzheimer’s disease or dementia
- Onetime pneumococcal vaccine

### OTHER SCREENINGS FOR GOOD HEALTH

Other exams for adults include regular dental and eye exams, and hearing tests if you have symptoms of hearing loss. Your primary care provider also might



### PRIMARY CARE FIRST PROGRAM BENEFITS MEDICARE PATIENTS

Holyoke Medical Group Adult Primary Care has joined Primary Care First, an innovative healthcare payment program with Medicare that reduces administrative burdens, enabling clinicians to devote more time to patient care. Medicare shares personal health information with Holyoke Medical Center, such as when you receive care at hospitals, emergency departments and specialist offices. This gives providers a complete picture of your health and allows them to better coordinate your care. Your Medicare benefits will not change with this program, and you still have the right to visit any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare, at any time.

perform a mental health exam to evaluate psychological concerns. A physical assessment of your height, weight and body mass index (BMI) can determine future health risks and guide lifestyle changes in diet and exercise.

“Screenings and other preventive care can make a huge difference in both health and quality of life,” says Dr. Graziano. “If you haven’t seen your primary care doctor since the pandemic began, I recommend making an appointment. Catching problems early gives us more treatment options and usually improves outcomes.”

**\* Even if you’re feeling well, you should visit a healthcare provider every year for important screenings. To make an appointment with a primary care provider at Holyoke Medical Group, please call [413.535.4800](tel:413.535.4800).**

# TAKE CHARGE OF INCONTINENCE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH LEAKING URINE,  
A COMMON PROBLEM FOR WOMEN.

**LET'S BE HONEST.** Leaking urine can spoil a lot of moments, from a heartfelt laugh to a personal-best athletic feat. Nearly 1 in 2 women over the age of 50 report at least some urinary incontinence. The good news: It usually doesn't indicate a serious disease, and excellent treatment options are available.

## TWO CAUSES

There are two primary types of urinary incontinence: stress incontinence and urge incontinence. "Stress incontinence is when movement, such as coughing, jogging, sneezing or laughing, puts pressure on the bladder and causes leaking," says Alexander Berry, MD, of Holyoke Medical Center Urology Services. This condition is often brought on by pregnancy or childbirth, which can damage the muscles that control urination.

In urge incontinence, leaking happens when you have a strong, sudden need to urinate. "Abnormal bladder contractions caused by incorrect signals from the brain can force urine out of the body," explains Dr. Berry. "The cause of urge incontinence often cannot be identified, but it can occur with conditions such as diabetes, stroke, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease."



Alexander Berry, MD

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

Several treatment alternatives exist for urinary incontinence, depending on its cause. The first step is to see your doctor. He or she will take a medical history and may perform a physical

examination and order diagnostic tests, such as urine cultures and blood tests.

For stress incontinence, treatments include behavioral and lifestyle changes and Kegel exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor.

"There are lifestyle changes that can help, too," says Dr. Berry. "For example, limit fluids before bedtime and cut back on caffeinated beverages, which can make incontinence worse. Excess weight also can play a role, so exercise and a healthy diet are important."

Medical devices, such as a urethral insert or pessary, can help to physically block urine leakage. Surgery may be an option, although it's generally seen as a last resort.

Treating urge incontinence is slightly different. A technique called urgency suppression can help you manage the need to urinate by training your bladder to maintain control. Biofeedback can help you learn to recognize when your bladder is overactive.

In addition, medications are available to relax the bladder. Botox, the drug used to decrease facial wrinkles, can be injected into the bladder to relax the muscle, resulting in a decrease in incontinence.

"The important thing to remember is that urinary incontinence is not something you have to live with," says Dr. Berry. "Your doctor can help you find the right treatment option to fit your specific situation and lifestyle."

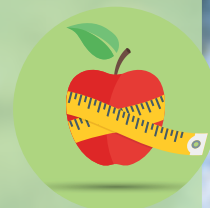
**\* The HMC Urology Center is located at 10 Hospital Drive, Suite 204, Holyoke. To schedule an appointment, please call 413.533.3912.**





## 6 LIFESTYLE CHANGES THAT CAN HELP

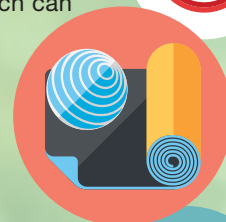
**1. Maintain a healthy weight.** Exercise and choose healthy foods to avoid or reduce excess weight, which can contribute to incontinence.



**2. Quit smoking.** Smoking can cause coughing, which can make leaking worse.



**3. Perform pelvic floor exercises,** such as Kegels, to strengthen the muscles that support the bladder.



**4. Limit your intake of** beverages containing alcohol and caffeine.



**5. Avoid lifting heavy things.**



**6. Don't drink a lot of fluids** before you exercise or go to bed.







# MAKING QUALITY CARE CONVENIENT

FOR THOSE LIVING IN THE WESTFIELD AREA, EXCELLENT HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS AND SERVICES ARE CLOSE AT HAND IN A SINGLE LOCATION.

**THE DOCTORS** and staff at Holyoke Medical Center (HMC) are committed to providing convenient access to high-quality care. For the citizens of Westfield and its surrounding communities, the hospital has made good on that promise with HMC's Westfield Outpatient Services, located at 140 Southampton Road.

"We believe that having a high-quality medical facility nearby will encourage people to take better care of their own and their family's overall health," says Marcel Moniz, Executive Director of Ancillary Services at HMC. "We now have a wide variety of services available, all located within the same building."

The facility is anchored by HMC-affiliated Holyoke Medical Group (HMG) practices and includes family medicine, walk-in care, and OB/GYN & Midwifery. Gastroenterology and other specialty providers will soon be added.

"Our Westfield services are truly a one-stop convenience," says Moniz. "You can come and easily park—no bothering with a parking garage. And in one building you can get primary care for everything from pediatrics up through geriatrics, as well as OB/GYN services. The walk-in clinic is there for acute illnesses and injuries; there's physical therapy and the lab draw station. There's just no reason left to put off getting the care you need."



## HOLYOKE MEDICAL GROUP FAMILY MEDICINE

Thomas J. Graziano, MD, a family medicine physician, and Sonia Valentine, DNP, provide exceptional and compassionate primary care to patients in all phases of life, from well-baby checks to arthritis and everything in between. They treat illnesses, such as obesity, heart disease, hypertension and respiratory conditions, and minor injuries. To schedule an appointment with Holyoke Medical Group Family Medicine, call **413.535.4800**.





Samantha  
McVay, MD

## HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER OB/GYN & MIDWIFERY

Specialized care for women is available at Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery, which provides services in Westfield at least one day a week. One of the practice's physicians, Samantha McVay, MD, works with patients there to provide high-quality family planning, prenatal, postnatal and gynecology care. To schedule an appointment with Holyoke Medical Center OB/GYN & Midwifery, call **413.534.2826**.



Having a physical therapy provider close to home enabled Robert Castor to make appointments before work.

## EARLY MORNING CORE WORK

Robert Castor, Cardiology, Neurology, Respiratory Care and Sleep Lab Manager at Holyoke Medical Center (HMC) and a Westfield resident, learned the advantages of having nearby health services when he experienced a shoulder injury in December 2020.

"We were donating an artificial Christmas tree to a friend," he says. "And I forgot just how heavy the base was. When I picked it up, I strained my neck and shoulder blade."

When he was unable to "shake it off," as he says he usually does with minor maladies, his primary care physician suggested a course of physical therapy. Luckily, HMC's expansion into Westfield included physical therapy services through CORE (Centers of Rehabilitation Excellence).

"It was awesome," says Castor. "Since all I had to do was drive to the top of my street, I scheduled my appointments at 7 a.m. That way, when I came to work my shoulder was feeling better and I was more relaxed."

After completing treatment, Castor said he no longer has pain in his shoulder and neck, and the techniques he learned are helping him improve his posture and perhaps avoid injuries in the future.

"It's good to have these services so nearby," he says. "I'm due for blood work soon, so next I'll be using the lab-draw facility."



## HOLYOKE MEDICAL GROUP WALK-IN CARE

The Southampton Road location also offers medical care without an appointment. The walk-in clinic makes it convenient to get care if you're experiencing an acute illness. For example, if someone has symptoms of COVID-19, they can be evaluated, see a doctor and get a COVID-19 test right away.

The walk-in clinic's medical professionals also treat minor illnesses and injuries. Minor wounds can be sutured, insect bites can be treated and seasonal allergies can be addressed. Need a school or work physical? No problem. That's just one more handy service offered by the clinic. Holyoke Medical Group Walk-in Care is open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.




## HMC LAB DRAW STATION

If your doctor orders a blood test, for example to check cholesterol levels, blood sugar or blood-cell counts, the Westfield office houses an HMC Lab Draw Station, where you can have blood drawn by an expert team that prides itself on making patients feel safe and comfortable. No appointment is needed, and blood can be drawn not only for HMC physicians, but also for outside referrals. Blood is sent to the HMC Lab for testing and results are shared with your doctor. HMC Lab Draw Station is open Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. For questions, call **413.535.4895**.



## CORE PHYSICAL THERAPY

If you're recovering from an injury or surgery, have a medical condition like arthritis or are experiencing balance issues, your doctor might recommend physical therapy. The skilled therapists at CORE (Centers of Rehabilitation Excellence) Physical Therapy treat a wide range of orthopedic and neurological conditions. See the sidebar "Early Morning CORE Work," to read about one patient's physical therapy experience. To make an appointment with CORE Physical Therapy, please call **413.535.4996**.

A photograph showing three healthcare workers in an emergency department. In the foreground, a man with glasses and a blue surgical mask is seated at a computer, looking at a monitor. A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black face mask and a dark jacket over a blue scrub top, is leaning over him, pointing at the screen with a pen. Behind them, another man in a maroon shirt and blue surgical mask stands, also looking at the screen. The background shows a busy hospital environment with other staff and equipment.

Recovery Support  
Team members  
review a patient's  
file in the Emergency  
Department.

# NEW HELP FOR OPIOID ADDICTION

HOLYOKE MEDICAL CENTER IS PART OF A  
NATIONAL RESEARCH GRANT AIMED AT IMPROVING  
CARE FOR PEOPLE WITH OPIOID USE DISORDER.



## MASSACHUSETTS IS RANKED

among the top 10 states in the United States with the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths. In the western part of Massachusetts, there has been an alarming trend upward, with the COVID-19 pandemic further fueling drug use.

Maria Quinn, MSN, PMHNP-BC, a psychiatric nurse practitioner and clinical director of the Recovery Support Team at Holyoke Medical Center (HMC), has witnessed the struggles of opioid addiction firsthand. "My brother has been in recovery for several years and is doing great, but the time leading up to that was a struggle for all of us," she says. "Growing up in Holyoke, it was my mom and me trying to figure out his behavior. It wasn't until I became educated and learned that addiction is a disease that affects brain function that I began to understand."

Today, Quinn is sharing her expertise in substance use disorder as a member of a coalition of Holyoke organizations participating in the HEALing Communities Study ([www.healtogetherma.org/Holyoke](http://www.healtogetherma.org/Holyoke)). This multistate study, funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is investigating how tools for preventing and treating opioid misuse and opioid use disorder are most effective at the local level.

Holyoke—the only western Massachusetts location taking part in the first wave of the study—is one of 16 communities in Massachusetts involved in the study, and HMC is playing a key role. Convened by researchers at Boston

Medical Center, the study will test the effectiveness of programs designed to increase the number of individuals receiving medication to treat opioid use disorder, increase the

distribution of the overdose-reversal medication naloxone and reduce high-risk opioid prescribing. The goal is to decrease opioid-related overdose deaths by 40 percent over the course of the study.

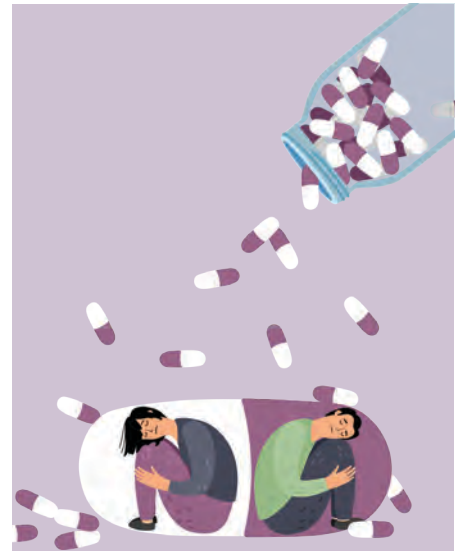
## SAVING LIVES AND IMPROVING CARE

In addition to HMC, the coalition includes Tapestry Health, Holyoke Health Center, Hope for Holyoke, Behavioral Health Network, Holyoke District Court and others. The coalition meets monthly and in subcommittees focusing on evidence-based strategies to improve treatment access and retention, promote better Narcan (naloxone) distribution and help educate and eliminate stigma.

Quinn says a new opioid treatment program was funded through the study, as was a transportation van to get people to and from treatment. At HMC, an addiction consultation service supports patients in the Emergency Department and all inpatient medical units. The consult team is comprised of a certified addictions nurse, a recovery support coordinator, recovery coaches and Quinn, who oversees the consult service and is a provider as well. This multidisciplinary team supports patients by assessing readiness for treatment, providing harm-reduction resources and starting medications for opioid use disorder. The consult service compliments existing outpatient addiction treatment and recovery services at HMC, including the Comprehensive Care Center where treatment for alcohol use disorder and opioid use disorder is provided.

Quinn, who serves a dual role in the HEALing Communities Study as a coalition participant and a bilingual provider, appreciates the collaboration among community organizations working toward a common goal.

"Addiction is like a whisper," Quinn says. "People don't really talk about it openly. This study helps get the word out that addiction is a treatable disease and that resources in the community are working together to help people who are struggling."



## RECOGNIZING OPIOID ADDICTION

Opioid addiction, also known as opioid use disorder, is a chronic and relapsing disease that affects the body and brain. Anyone can become addicted, even when opioids are prescribed by a doctor and taken as directed.

When using opioids has caused significant hardships like loss of employment or legal or money issues, a person's **continued use** is a major warning sign of addiction. Other signs could include:

- Trying to stop or cut down on opioid use but not being able to
- Inability to fulfill responsibilities at school, home or work
- Hurting relationships with family and friends because of opioid use
- Developing a tolerance and needing larger amounts of opioids to get the effect you want
- Taking opioids to avoid or relieve withdrawal symptoms
- Having strong cravings for opioids

**Addiction is a medical condition. Treatment can help. Recovery is possible.**



Maria Quinn, MSN, PMHNP-BC

**\* The Holyoke Medical Center Comprehensive Care Center provides substance use disorder treatment and infectious disease management at 575 Beech Street, Suite 404, Holyoke. Walk-in care is available Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. To learn more or schedule an appointment, call 413.535.4889.**

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