

HealthLINK

WINTER 2025

YOUR CONNECTION TO HEALTH & WELLNESS

HEARTS, MINDS, CONNECTIONS

VALLEY HEALTH'S STRONGER TOGETHER CAMPAIGN EXPANDS
CRITICAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY

INSIDE:

Breakthroughs in
treating arrhythmias /
Identifying the
vital health needs of
our community /
New mental health
crisis care unit



 **ValleyHealth**
Healthier, together.

WELCOME

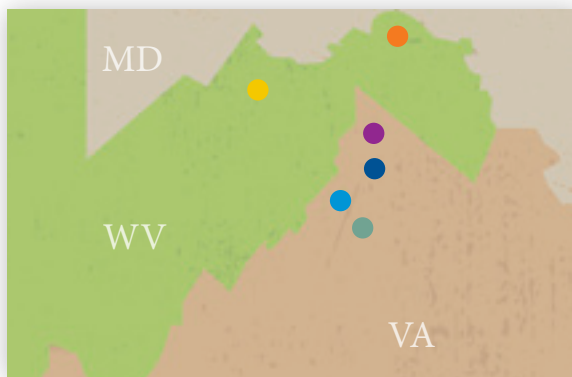
STRONGER TOGETHER

In every issue of *HealthLINK*, we spotlight what makes Valley Health one of the best health care systems in the country, whether it is our advanced technology, compassionate caregivers or the expansion of our services in the region. But none of this would be possible without your support.

The partnerships we forge with community members and organizations help assure that our loved ones receive health care that is accessible, affordable and exceptional for all. In this issue, we highlight our Stronger Together campaign: *Hearts, Minds, Connections*. Through this campaign, we aim to raise money to improve and expand our cardiovascular, behavioral health and mobile unit services. With your support, we will be better able to help and serve our neighbors, friends and loved ones ... and you!

Also in this issue, you will find information about the services, providers and technology we offer at Valley Health hospitals and facilities. Learn about heart procedures that save lives and shorten recovery time, our new practices and providers, and the caregivers who go above and beyond in providing you the best patient experience.

On the cover: cardiologist Daniel Alexander, DO; donor Gerald "J.J." Smith; Winchester Medical Center President Tonya Smith; and President and CEO Mark Nantz.



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

Valley Health System includes:

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

Additional locations and services:

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

For more information, visit valleyhealthlink.com/locations.



Valley Health System

Serving Our Community by Improving Health

HealthLINK

The magazine of Valley Health System
Serving the Northern Shenandoah Valley, the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia and the surrounding areas

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- Tonya Smith, President, Winchester Medical Center

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

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

Contact questions@valleyhealthlink.com or 540-536-5325 to be added to our mailing list; view *HealthLINK* online at valleyhealthlink.com/news.

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N. Travis Clark

CLARK SHINES BRIGHT WITH COMMUNITY STAR AWARD

N. Travis Clark, Valley Health vice president of operations at Page Memorial Hospital in Luray, Virginia, and Shenandoah Memorial Hospital in Woodstock, Virginia, has been honored with the prestigious Community Star award by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH). Clark is the sole health care executive in the commonwealth to receive this accolade this year.

The NOSORH Community Star Recognition Program, established in 2015 to coincide with National Rural Health Day (November 21), celebrates individuals and organizations making significant contributions to rural communities. Since its inception, over 300 health care leaders and organizations have been honored as Community Stars.

In an effort to address food insecurity challenges, Clark helped organize a number of community gardens on several Valley Health campuses in Page and Shenandoah counties that yielded over 7,000 pounds of produce last year. In addition, Clark was appointed to the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association's Rural Health Task Force with the aim of advancing rural health across the state. Recently, the task force submitted a report with recommendations to address such issues as behavioral and maternal health services, transportation, and workforce development.

"I am deeply honored to be a recipient of this award," says Clark. "It takes a team to advance rural health on a local, regional, state and national effort. No one knows that better than the dedicated men and women who come to work every day in our hospitals and provide the expert care that our communities deserve. I'm just thankful that I can be one of the voices that advocates for our families, friends and neighbors."

HEALTHIER TOGETHER

EMPATH UNIT OFFERS MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN A THERAPEUTIC SETTING

This fall, Valley Health opened the Valley Health Emergency, Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment, and Healing (EmPATH) unit. This new facility is the first of its kind in the Northern Shenandoah Valley, offering immediate mental health care in a therapeutic environment and setting a new standard for mental health crisis care.

Located at Winchester Medical Center, the EmPATH unit provides an alternative to the emergency room for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. As the first EmPATH unit in a hospital setting in Virginia that accepts direct patient walk-ins, it ensures timely and appropriate care in an environment designed to accommodate the needs of these patients.

"Meeting mental health needs is a top priority for Valley Health," says Mark Nantz, President and CEO of Valley Health. "The EmPATH unit represents a significant advancement in mental health care, offering a safe and supportive environment for those in crisis. It provides immediate assessment, treatment and healing, underscoring Valley Health's dedication to creating a comprehensive mental health crisis response system in the Northern Shenandoah Valley."



The Valley Health Emergency, Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment, and Healing (EmPATH) unit opened in October with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Valley Health has expanded its offerings at the Jubal Early location in Winchester.

ENDOCRINOLOGY & DIABETES ASSOCIATES PRACTICE OPENS ON JUBAL EARLY DRIVE

In September, Valley Health Endocrinology & Diabetes Associates opened its doors in Winchester at 519 W. Jubal Early Drive, suite 200.

This new practice provides additional access to endocrinology care for patients in the Shenandoah Valley. Daliha Aqbal, MD; Ramsha Shafiq, MD; and Rhonda L. Cottino, PA, offer care in diabetes, thyroid and parathyroid services, and other hormonal health services.

This expansion at 519 W. Jubal Early Drive follows the opening of Valley Health Primary Care | Jubal Early and a Valley Health laboratory location, which opened in the building over the summer. In addition, Valley Health Ear, Nose and Throat recently moved into the facility from the Winchester Medical Center campus.



For more information about Valley Health Endocrinology & Diabetes Associates, call **540-536-2110** or visit the website by scanning the QR code.

GREENWOOD FAMILY PRACTICE TAKES SHAPE TO PROVIDE MORE PRIMARY CARE ACCESS

Valley Health has broken ground on its new Valley Health Primary Care | Greenwood location, which will open this fall next to Orrick Commons.

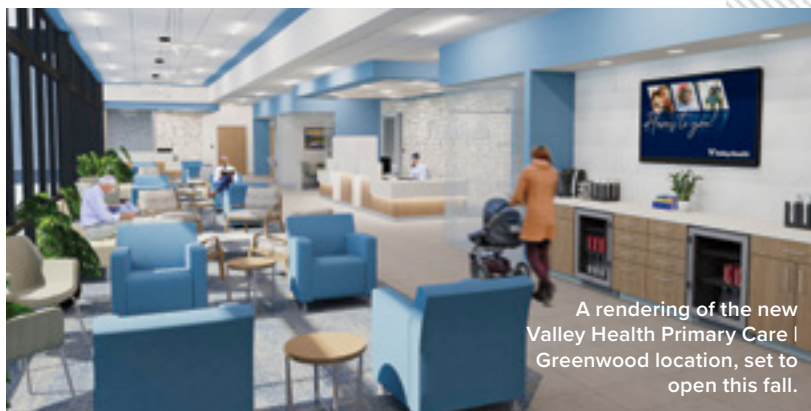
This brand-new 13,000-square-foot facility will have a primary care practice and outpatient laboratory and will bring physicians and Advanced Practice Providers even closer to major areas of growth in Winchester, making it easier for residents who live on Winchester's east side to access care.

The opening of Valley Health Primary Care | Greenwood is one of several primary care practices Valley Health has opened and expanded over the past few years. Others include:

- Valley Health Primary Care | Berryville (opened August 2023)
- Valley Health Primary Care | Jubal Early (move and expansion; opened June 2024)
- Valley Health Primary Care | Strasburg (move and expansion; opened December 2024)

In addition, Valley Health Internal Medicine | Ranson will move into a newly built facility this year that features support services such as lab and specialists' offices.

In 2026, Valley Health Family Medicine | Hedgesville will move into an expanded space and add new providers.



A rendering of the new Valley Health Primary Care | Greenwood location, set to open this fall.

LIVE & LEARN



VIRTUAL VISITS FOR URGENT CARE

With the My Valley Health mobile app, Urgent Care is just a click away

Valley Health Urgent Care virtual visits are a convenient way to see a provider from home when you have minor symptoms or illness. You can make an appointment with our online Urgent Care providers for non-emergent, common illnesses and conditions from the comfort of your own home.

Examples of symptoms we treat:

- Skin rashes and bug bites
- Scratchy or sore throat
- Poison ivy
- Congestion
- Pink eye
- Nausea
- Cold symptoms
- Fever

Virtual visits are for patients age 5 and older and are a self-pay service, which means insurance is not accepted. All visits are a flat fee of \$59.

Starting a virtual visit is easy. Visit vhurgentcare.com or click Virtual Urgent Care from your My Valley Health mobile app.

Follow the prompts to start an Urgent Care virtual visit. You will be asked to enter some basic information like name, email, mobile phone

number and address. That way, when it is time for your appointment, we can send you a reminder to check in and begin your appointment.

Once you have entered your information, you can choose the appointment time that works for your schedule. Five minutes before your appointment time, you will receive a text message and an email with the link to begin checking in. This is where you will enter your payment information and fill out a little bit of your health history so that our providers can give you the best possible care.

During your virtual visit with one of our providers, you may be directed to one of our Valley Health Urgent Care locations if you need additional evaluation, testing or treatment.

Your provider will evaluate, diagnose and treat your symptoms during your virtual visit and will send any prescribed medications to your pharmacy of choice.

After your virtual visit, a summary and your visit notes will appear in your MyChart account.

Let us help you feel better faster.



Scan this QR code to get started with a virtual visit.

Learn how to receive non-emergent care from the comfort of home.



Scan this QR code to download the My Valley Health app and enhance your health care journey.

The My Valley Health mobile app allows easy access to MyChart and other health care resources on the go.*

**Available to download on Apple and Google mobile devices.*

NEXT-LEVEL VALVE REPLACEMENT

VALLEY HEALTH'S EXPERTS OFFER TRANSCATHETER AORTIC VALVE REPLACEMENT PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE PATIENTS' HEART HEALTH

In August, Stephen Sandretzky, 83, walked 4,000 steps the day after undergoing a minimally invasive transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) at Valley Health's Heart & Vascular Center in Winchester. During the replacement, interventional cardiologists performed a "valve-in-valve-in-valve" procedure, in which they placed a new aortic valve inside two older valves that were no longer functioning well.

Born with a congenital heart defect, Sandretzky's aortic valve was prone to becoming stiff, causing the heart to work under significant stress. His aortic valve had two leaflets, instead of three. The condition affects about one in 50 people, says Valley Health interventional cardiologist and structural heart specialist Aref A. Bin Abdulhak, MD.

Sandretzky received his first valve in 2006 in a hospital outside the region. When the valve began to fail, a second valve was installed inside it during a 2018 TAVR procedure at Valley Health. Sandretzky's third valve was installed this past summer after the second one began to fail.

Sandretzky's case is unusual, but aortic valve disease is not. It affects one in 20 older Americans, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For some,

it is life-threatening. "Patients with severe symptomatic aortic valve stenosis [narrowing] typically complain of shortness of breath and chest pain, and sometimes they pass out," says Dr. Bin Abdulhak, who performed Sandretzky's most recent TAVR. "It's a serious problem that can be fatal within two years for half of the people with it. When the valve is replaced, survival and symptoms improve."

In a TAVR procedure, a replacement valve is advanced to the heart through the patient's blood vessels and implanted inside the existing valve, rather than through open-heart surgery. "TAVR is at least as effective as open-heart surgery and safer for people considered at high or moderate risk of complications from open surgery," Dr. Bin Abdulhak says. Recovery is usually faster than with open surgery. TAVR valve-in-valve-in-valve procedures are also an option

when older replacement valves become stiff and leaky, he says. "People may think symptoms like chest pain and feeling out of breath are just due to aging, when it could be a valve issue. It's important to discuss it with your family doctor."

Sandretzky, a Winchester resident, jogged the Apple Blossom Valley Health 10K and completed the Loudoun Street Mile in Winchester in 2019, just a year after his first TAVR. He won the Apple Blossom 10K for his age group in 2023. He hopes to compete as a walker in both events this year and is undergoing cardiac rehab to rebuild strength and endurance.

Dr. Bin Abdulhak credits the training and experience of Valley Health's team and the health system's state-of-the-art technology—including the availability of three types of new replacement aortic valves—for Sandretzky's success. "I totally trust the people here," Sandretzky says. "It has been a great experience."

Visit valleyhealthlink.com/AVC to learn more.



Stephen Sandretzky has resumed his active lifestyle, thanks to his TAVR procedure.

IDENTIFYING OUR COMMUNITY'S HEALTH NEEDS

VALLEY HEALTH'S COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROVIDES AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT PRIORITIES

Health issues affecting individuals and communities across our country are frequent stories in the news and in our social media feeds. However, it is important for Valley Health to understand the specific health needs that are most critical here in the Northern Shenandoah Valley and surrounding region.

Valley Health conducts Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA) for each of our six hospitals to identify the health needs of the residents we serve. As part of the CHNA, Valley Health partners with the Virginia Department of Health, area nonprofit organizations, local government officials and other key community stakeholders to learn where gaps in services exist and to identify priorities for action.

The last CHNA was completed in 2022 and found consistent health priorities across our region: chronic disease and health behaviors; mental health and substance abuse; access to primary, preventive and clinical care; and social and economic factors that impact health. The Stronger Together capital campaign and Valley Health's grants to local nonprofit organizations are examples of Valley Health's response to the results of the 2022 CHNA.

Completed every three years, the 2025 CHNA began with the launch of a community health survey in November 2024. The survey included questions about health issues and behaviors, along with community-wide concerns such as economic stability, housing availability and transportation. The survey results will be supplemented with stakeholder interviews, community response sessions, and comparison with state and national data.

Once the health needs assessments are completed in July 2025, each Valley Health hospital will develop strategies addressing the identified needs. These strategies will be implemented over the next three years.

For more information about Valley Health's Community Health Needs Assessments, visit valleyhealthlink.com/CHNA.



VALLEY HEALTH GRANTS ADDRESS PRIORITY NEEDS

Ongoing support of area nonprofit organizations is guided by the results of the CHNA

Each year, Valley Health provides over \$1 million to area nonprofit organizations that address the critical health needs identified in the CHNA, including \$200,000 in Community Partnership Grants. Grant recipients are selected through a competitive application process that evaluates how their proposed projects align with Valley Health strategies and address needs identified in the CHNA.

Examples of organizations awarded Community Partnership Grants in 2024 include Horizon Goodwill Industries, Inc. (Winchester, VA), Winchester Area Temporary Transitional Shelter, Mountaineer Community Health Center, Inc. (Paw Paw, WV) and Bread of Life Food Pantry (Woodstock, VA).

Organizations receiving 2025 Community Partnership Grants will be announced in April.

For more information about Valley Health's commitment to our community, visit valleyhealthlink.com/community.

STRONGER

TOGETHER

➔ WITH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF DONORS LIKE GERALD “J.J.” SMITH, VALLEY HEALTH IS LEADING A TRANSFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO BETTER SERVE OUR COMMUNITY’S HEALTH CARE NEEDS

Gerald “J.J.” Smith, 63, has lived most of his life in Winchester, and so have generations of his family. “My three children were born at Winchester Medical Center,” he says. “My grandparents and mother received care for heart disease and cancer there, too.”

Now, Smith is giving back to the community with a generous philanthropic gift to Valley Health’s Stronger Together fundraising campaign, which will help expand access to essential health services in the region. “I believe in the mission of Valley Health,” he says. “I think we have a great health system, with great people. It’s pretty impressive to have this in our community.”

Stronger Together aims to raise \$20 million by December 2026 to fund new space to enhance state-of-the-art cardiovascular technologies, expand mental health care for teens and adults, and equip mobile health vans to bring lifesaving screenings, vaccines and health care access directly to area residents.

As part of the campaign and thanks to Smith’s donation, Valley Health’s Heart & Vascular Center will be expanded and has been named the Clyde A. Smith Heart & Vascular Center in honor of Smith’s grandfather, founder of the family rendering business that grew to become Valley Proteins of Winchester. (The company was sold in 2022.) Access to advanced heart care close to home is important, says Smith, who is also a member of the Valley Health Board of Trustees. “My grandfather

had his first heart attack at age 39 and died from heart disease in his early 50s. I have no doubt he would have lived into his 70s with the kinds of treatments we have today.”

Contributions of any size to Stronger Together will improve care for patients and their families, friends and neighbors. “Not everyone can make a large gift,” Smith says. “But when many people make smaller gifts, the impact is the same. Health care improves for all of us.”

stronger
TOGETHER

HEARTS • MINDS • CONNECTIONS



HEARTS, MINDS, CONNECTIONS

As a not-for-profit health care system, Valley Health invests back into the community to address unmet health needs. But those resources alone cannot eliminate all gaps in care.

Stronger Together focuses on “Hearts, Minds, Connections”—top needs identified in Valley Health’s recent



Donor Gerald "J.J." Smith stands in front of the Heart & Vascular Center named in honor of his grandfather.

health needs assessment as well as in outreach by the health system's hospital foundations. Valley Health gathered information from over 2,000 people who live and work in the region, including community residents, members of faith-based organizations, health care providers, elected officials, health professionals and leadership from each of Valley Health's six hospitals.

Here's what to know about the exciting projects funded by Stronger Together that will improve the future of health care for those in the Northern Shenandoah Valley and surrounding regions.

ADVANCING CARE FOR HEART AND VASCULAR HEALTH

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American men and women. Some cardiovascular conditions impact the region at rates higher than the national average. Atrial fibrillation (AFib) and other heart arrhythmias, for example, affect one in 18 Americans, but are even more prevalent in the Valley Health community as the area attracts a growing number of retirees.

The Stronger Together campaign will make possible the building of an additional procedure room at the Clyde A. Smith Heart & Vascular

Center to expand access to lifesaving and life-improving care. Existing procedure rooms will be updated to increase treatment options for AFib and other heart concerns. Treating AFib is important; the condition increases stroke risk fivefold. "Technology is rapidly changing," says Julie Miksit, RN, vice president of operations and service lines at Valley Health. "Our donors' gifts will help us improve access and provide new technology, helping us care for our patients in the Shenandoah Valley."

Valley Health already has a national reputation for excellence. In 2023, Winchester Medical Center was named a top 50 cardiovascular hospital by *Fortune* magazine and the information technology company PINC AI. Increased investment in the Clyde A. Smith Heart & Vascular Center will continue to attract prominent providers in the field.

"We are poised to be a heart and vascular center that makes a long-term impact on the cardiovascular health of the entire Shenandoah Valley," says cardiologist Daniel Alexander, DO, of Winchester Cardiology and Vascular

STRONGER TOGETHER

Medicine. “With a program of this caliber, we are able to provide long-reaching care to both our northern and southern communities. Our goal is to treat complex cardiovascular conditions including valvular, coronary and electrical disorders; teach the new generation of cardiovascular specialists; and decrease the burden of cardiovascular disease in our region. We want a healthy population that is able to do the great things that folks in the Valley have always done.”

A MENTAL HEALTH CENTER AND LIFE-CHANGING CARE NETWORK

Mental health emerged as the highest-priority health need across all of Valley Health’s service areas. Adults and young people alike need help with depression, anxiety, stress, substance use disorders, relationship issues and other concerns. Valley Health is already expanding services in these areas, and Stronger Together will add new dimensions and new accessibility, so that care is convenient and closer to home.

“Everyone in this community is impacted by behavioral health,” says Karen Dorr, DNP, senior director of Behavioral Health Services at Valley Health. “When you make a gift to Stronger Together, you’re helping everyone—adults, kids, schools, law enforcement. It’s huge. It ripples out into the community.”

The campaign will fund construction of Valley Health’s mental health center. This freestanding facility on the Winchester Medical Center campus will be a place to heal, thrive and restore relationships for individuals and others in their life. It will house new youth programs that protect and support mental health and provide treatment for substance use disorders, including intensive outpatient programs that provide young people with ongoing support as they transition back home after inpatient care. The center will also expand adult mental

“Everyone in this community is impacted by behavioral health. When you make a gift to Stronger Together, you’re helping everyone—adults, kids, schools, law enforcement. It’s huge. It ripples out into the community.” —KAREN DORR, DNP, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES AT VALLEY HEALTH

health services, including treatment of substance use disorders, which will decrease the need for social services interventions and reduce fatal overdoses. Stronger Together will establish a digital health center that puts contact with Valley Health mental health providers at the fingertips of community medical practices so people can receive prompt mental health care.

“We hope to move into more areas of care,” says psychiatrist Louis Nardelli, DO, of Valley Behavioral Health. “People with anxiety, depression, stress or who feel overwhelmed will have access to providers who can help. I hope the center can extend beyond that and help with preventive mental health care through screening and psychological education. We are also going to develop a geriatric program for older adults, including memory care. And if a person is diagnosed with a medical condition that they have difficulty coping with, the center will be a resource for them, too. The vision is that it will be a center for hope, a center for resilience.”

MOBILE HEALTH CARE THAT COMES TO YOU

If you’re busy with work and family, lack transportation, or live far from health services, getting regular medical care can be a major challenge. Too often, people delay or skip health screenings, vaccines and other vital services as a result—and that can lead to the discovery of medical conditions in more advanced stages and the need for more intensive treatment and emergency department visits.

One solution to this challenge is health care that travels to your community, church, school or place of work.

Currently, less than 50% of eligible women in the community get their annual screening mammogram. Stronger Together will fund mobile health vans that bring preventive services, including mammograms, out to the communities. “We know that mammograms save lives. But a significant number of women are not getting their mammogram every year,” says Christopher Nieman, MD, of Winchester Radiologists. “If we catch even one incidence of breast cancer with mobile mammography when it is early and treatable with a good outcome, that is one life saved.”

Many people in the region live 30 to 40 minutes away from their primary care provider and over an hour away from a specialist. Mobile health units will have telehealth



From left: Valley Health CEO and President Mark Nantz; Senior Vice President, Acute Care, and Winchester Medical Center President Tonya Smith; donor Gerald “J.J.” Smith; and Valley Health Foundations Executive Director Jenny Grooms next to a portrait of Clyde Smith.

capability and a nurse or other practitioner trained in telehealth onboard, so patients can see their primary care practitioner or specialist via telehealth without making a long drive or missing too much time away from work or home.

Onboard the van, a practitioner trained to facilitate a telehealth appointment will provide the necessary medical care, such as drawing blood for testing, conducting a physical or neurological exam or positioning equipment so the doctor on-screen can see inside a patient’s ear or hear their heartbeat. “By bringing care to patients, we help them be healthier in the long run,” says Jeffrey Feit, MD, chief population health officer and chief medical information officer for Valley Health.

HOW TO GIVE

Healthier lives and healthier communities are easier to achieve when a community works together. To date, Stronger Together is off to a successful start, raising \$16.7 million from foundational donors like Smith. The mental health center and mobile mammography van have also received transformational gifts whose stories will be shared soon. The \$3 million to be raised in the next two years will achieve the campaign goal and ensure that these crucial services become reality.

“Our Foundations connect resources to mission, much like we did when making the freestanding Cancer Center possible in our community,” says Jenny Grooms, executive director of Valley Health Foundations. “Every dollar to Stronger Together is a contribution to your community. It’s a courageous ask—and I am humbled and grateful for those that raised their hand and said they want to be part of the solution to our community’s greatest needs.”

“By working together, we can touch the lives of everyone in our community,” adds Mark Nantz, President and CEO of Valley Health. “From youth struggling with mental health, to adults dealing with heart disease, to a woman who cannot miss work to get a mammogram. No gift is too small, and every donation is essential in helping Valley Health continue to address crucial health needs in our community.”

*To support the campaign or learn more, please visit
valleyhealthlink.com/stronger.*

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

→ NINE BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS REFLECT ON THEIR HEALTH CARE JOURNEYS

In September, Marsha Nelson, MD, a Valley Health board-certified surgeon specializing in breast surgery and diseases, spearheaded a makeover project to honor breast cancer survivors. Nine women received hair and makeup from Wellspring, Valley Health's cancer resource center, while Kimberly's provided outfits and Summit Events took photos. Survivors' photos and quotes were displayed in the Valley Health Cancer Center throughout the month of October.

Here is what they had to say about their experiences—and the advice they have for others.



Mandy Butler, Winchester, VA

“I feel so blessed that every part of my journey was so quick. I had no time to dwell, and every nurse, every registration access associate and Dr. [Anita] Minghini treated me as family, showing compassion. I have learned to stop and smell the roses. Take one day and step at a time.”



Misty Corbin, Petersburg, WV

“My cancer diagnosis changed my priorities, and it also changed my perspective on life. I now have a deeper respect for life and a more focused understanding of the things that are most important to me. Throughout this ordeal, everyone has been incredibly kind and has gone above and beyond to support and guide me. I was given the opportunity to participate in my treatment and care plan at every appointment, and the doctors, nurses and staff were willing to listen. It was incredible how much respect, kindness and compassion were displayed. Remember, cancer is just a chapter, not the whole story.”



Juana del Pielago, Winchester, VA

“Everything is possible. Cancer can be curable if you treat it at the right time. From the diagnostic center through the surgery, radiation and follow-up appointments, I received kind service. I always [felt taken care of] ... treated with kindness and care.”



Meenu Gopal, Winchester, VA

“Build awareness for yourself and learn about self-care. [I received] kindness and compassion from nurses and staff, and honesty and education from the physicians. It was a very optimistic approach at every level, top to bottom.”



Becky Kingsberry, Charles Town, WV

“This journey has taught me that life is fragile and unpredictable, but also that it is full of moments of beauty and strength that we often overlook. There were times when I felt like giving up, but I discovered an inner strength that I didn’t know I had. The care and support I received at Valley Health made it more bearable. They treated me with kindness, respect and a genuine concern for my well-being, which made all the difference in my journey.”



Morgan Kuykendall, Romney, WV

“Cancer does not discriminate against age. But having wonderful doctors and a great support system helps. I was pregnant at the time. Dr. [Anita] Minghini and Dr. [William] Houck worked closely with my other doctors to make sure that the best care was given to me and my daughter, and I am forever thankful for that. I hope my experience will help someone. I was 26 when I was diagnosed. Getting imaging done is so important.”



Cindy Mangold, Clearbrook, VA

“The genuine care of my team was remarkable from day one to current. Their sincere compassion, honesty and, in my case, humor, made each appointment and decision a much easier pill to swallow. Enjoy the good days, rest on the bad days and embrace the love that surrounds you.”



Jean Mauck, Front Royal, VA

“I was treated like a princess from day one! I felt the utmost respect, caring, compassion and uplifting moments each time I visited the [Valley Health Breast Center], from each physician to each tech. I had four weeks of radiation after my surgery. I honestly missed the treatments at the end due to the overwhelming kindness and compassion with humor that I received every day. I have been blessed by such a remarkable team of helpers and other cancer patients the entire journey.”



Nancy Ryan, Woodstock, VA

“I felt like part of the care team. Everyone was professional, caring and encouraging. I was totally informed and had the best treatment. Most of the team were cancer survivors. They know what this journey is like. They shared their stories. It was encouraging to know people do survive. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Once you have a plan, you’ll feel empowered, confident.”

SPOTLIGHT



A NEW OPTION FOR TREATING ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

Pulsed field ablation reduces risks and brings success to patients with arrhythmias

Electrophysiologists at Winchester Medical Center are among the first in the region to offer a new treatment option to patients with atrial fibrillation (AFib), a heart condition that results in an abnormal heart rhythm and carries the risk of stroke, heart failure and blood clots.

Symptoms of AFib include heart palpitations, shortness of breath, extreme fatigue and chest pain. The condition results in about 158,000 deaths each year in

the U.S. and causes about one in seven strokes, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Risk factors include obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, advancing age, heart failure and diabetes.

Depending on the individual patient's needs, treatment for AFib may involve lifestyle changes, medications or a procedure called an ablation. The electrophysiologists at Winchester Medical Center (WMC) perform minimally invasive ablations using catheters inserted through vessels in the leg. Ablation techniques have traditionally used heat or cold energy to disable the heart cells that are the source of the electrical abnormality, thereby restoring a regular heartbeat.



Members of the Winchester Medical Center electrophysiology team, including Todd Teigeler, MD (center); Emmanuel Ekanem, MD (front row, second from right); and Daniel Alexander, DO (far right).

Valley Health is one of the first in the region to implement pulsed field ablation for arrhythmia management.

Pulsed field ablation, or PFA, is a recent FDA-approved technology that uses ultrarapid electrical pulses, rather than thermal energy, to better target myocardial tissue. During PFA, electrical pulses lasting a nanosecond to a microsecond disable cardiac cells, resulting in a safer procedure and more protection for surrounding tissue.

“Having done AFib ablation for the past 15 years, I have seen evolutionary changes that have improved the efficacy, safety and durability of the procedure,” says Daniel Alexander, DO, chairman of the Winchester

Medical Center Electrophysiology Clinical Council. “Pulsed field ablation is the newest energy-delivery device, improving on the safety profile for AFib ablation that will help us treat this condition for a greater number of patients, safely and effectively.”

The electrophysiology team at WMC has used PFA to treat patients with AFib, resulting in shorter procedure times and less time under anesthesia. Most importantly, the precision of this new nonthermal ablation technology allows electrophysiologists to use tightly controlled pulsed electrical fields to target the exact cardiac cells they wish to treat, with reduced risk of injury to surrounding cardiac tissue.

Valley Health electrophysiologist Todd Teigeler, MD, participated in PFA clinical trials and received additional training on the new technology before Valley Health’s first case in June 2024. Since then, Valley Health electrophysiologists have successfully performed multiple cases a week.

“We have been watching the evolution of the science and clinical performance of PFA for years leading up to the first application at Winchester Medical Center,” Teigeler says. “There was remarkable coordination between the doctors, the leadership at Valley Health and industry partners to make this leading-edge technology available to our community as soon as the superior safety profile was validated and received FDA approval. The dedicated team of Valley Health nurses and techs completed specific training on this modality, so that by the time of the first pulsed field ablation case, everyone knew what to do.”

Emmanuel Ekanem, MD, a cardiac electrophysiologist with Winchester Cardiology and Vascular Medicine | Valley Health, played an important role in establishing the safety profile for the new technology, serving as the lead investigator in clinical research of PFA in patients with AFib. Dr. Ekanem is the lead author of a 2024 paper published in the prestigious journal *Nature Medicine* that studies the safety of pulsed field ablation in more than 17,000 patients with atrial fibrillation across Europe.

The advent of pulsed field ablation, he says, is a testament to medical innovation spanning preclinical studies, randomized controlled trials and one of the most comprehensive multinational registries demonstrating its safety in real-world practice.

“The prevalence of atrial fibrillation continues to increase with significant impact on the quality of life and clinical outcomes of our patients,” Dr. Ekanem says. “This represents a major advancement in the treatment of atrial fibrillation. We are excited for the opportunity to use this leading-edge technology to continue to deliver world-class care to our patients in the region.”

For more information, visit valleyhealthlink.com/winchester-cardiology.



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