

Healthy Living



Trimming down

Life-changing
bariatric surgery

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Spring 2024



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Letter from the president

Dear friends,

Spring, a season of hope and renewal, has once again graced us with its warmth and vibrant blossoms. As we shed our winter layers, it naturally prompts us to reflect on our health aspirations. While the pull of New Year's resolutions may have slightly waned, the arrival of spring serves as a reminder that positive changes to our well-being are always within reach.

In my role as the president and chief medical officer of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, I take pride in the wealth of specialists we have to support individuals in achieving their health goals. Over the past year, we have expanded our team with the addition of a new general surgeon, neurologist, urologist, additional obstetricians/gynecologists and welcomed new providers to our MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute. This growth reflects our commitment to anticipating and addressing the evolving healthcare needs of our expanding community.

As we embrace this season of renewal and growth, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for the trust and support you have placed in us. Your health and well-being are paramount, and we are dedicated to enhancing our services continually to better serve you.

Wishing you a delightful spring filled with growth, good health, and happiness.

Warm regards,

Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP



I was honored to participate in the Leonardtown Veterans' Day Parade last November. It was such an uplifting experience to be part of a community celebrating and thanking our veterans. As I have become more involved with the Southern Maryland Navy Alliance and learned about the work being carried out in our community, I have an even greater appreciation for our hardworking military members and the sacrifices of their families. Thank you for all that you do!

Q&A with neurologist Toluwalase Tofade, MD

MedStar Health welcomes Dr. Tofade, fellowship-trained neurologist, now seeing patients with a range of neurological needs at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

Q. What are the most common reasons a patient might seek out a neurologist?

Headaches, seizures, stroke, low back pain, neck pain, tingling feet, weakness, gait/balance issues, dizziness, memory loss, and tremors frequently bring patients in to see us.

Q. What inspired you to pursue the field of neurology?

Honestly, I chose to specialize in neurology because it was the only field I found challenging in medical school. I was especially fascinated by the delicate intricacy and complexity of the human brain. I also love the detective nature of the field, as it is one of the few specialties in which we can localize the pathology or make a diagnosis based on symptoms and examination findings. Apart from the clinical draw of neurology, the tremendous research potential in the field was very enticing.

Q. Multiple sclerosis (MS) is one of your clinical focus areas. Can you describe how MS affects patients, and what a treatment plan may look like?

The field of MS has come a long way in the last two decades and there are now multiple effective medication options for patients. MS no longer affects life expectancy, and many MS patients have a good quality of life. MS patients may present initially with unilateral vision loss, double vision, vertigo, numbness or weakness of extremities, balance issues, and/or bowel/bladder incontinence. These symptoms may improve to an



extent after steroid treatment or even spontaneously.

After a diagnosis of MS is made, we then start patients on disease modifying therapy through a process of shared decision making. The aim of treatment is to prevent relapses or progression of the disease. We approach the management of patients with MS holistically and this involves addressing issues such as

anxiety, depression, fatigue, and nerve pain.

Q. What element of your work do you find most rewarding?

I really cherish building trustful relationships with patients. It is also fulfilling when patients feel better after treatment, or we figure out a complex diagnosis.



Toluwalase Tofade, MD



MedStar Health Neurology at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital
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Weight loss for life

Bariatric surgery helps local barber restore his health and energy



Alvin Tippet Jr. is no stranger to weight loss. At one time, with the help of a weight loss support program, Alvin, 53, had dropped 150 pounds. But through the years, the weight had crept back on and in 2022, suffering from severe sleep apnea, he knew it was time for a change.

"I was overweight and struggling to get through every day. My knees were killing me from standing up at work cutting hair as a barber," said Alvin.

Diagnosed with severe sleep apnea, Alvin's doctor prescribed a CPAP machine, but Alvin couldn't find a mask that fit him. He returned to his doctor for additional advice worried the sleep apnea could someday be fatal if he couldn't find a solution. Alvin's doctor quickly gave him an answer: lose 100 pounds.

"He asked if I had ever considered weight loss surgery, and I said, 'No, but if it means living on and not dying, it's a no-brainer,'" said Alvin.

Alvin was referred to the bariatric program at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital where he met with bariatric surgeon **Sameer Alrefai, MD**.

"I met with Alvin and could sense how concerned he was about his health and his sleep apnea," said Dr. Alrefai. "We talked about the surgical options and what he needed to do to qualify for surgery. He was a perfect candidate."

Before bariatric surgery, patients must complete several tests including blood work, an endoscopy, an EKG, and undergo a psychological evaluation, plus meet with a dietitian. During gastric sleeve, the surgeon removes 80% percent of the stomach reducing the size to a small pouch. Many insurance companies require surgery be performed through an



accredited bariatric program like the one at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

"I took all of my classes and did my part with the hopes of getting insurance approval," said Alvin. "I got the call and the news I wanted, and my surgery was scheduled for Jan. 17, 2023."

Alvin was excited for the surgery, but a little nervous, not about the gastric sleeve he was about to receive, but about the IV he needed for the surgery.



Sameer Alrefai, MD

and it did. My surgery went perfectly. Dr. Alrefai has a great bedside manner, and I was well informed."

Alvin was in the hospital for two nights and had four small incisions. He said he never experienced pain and was back to work at the barbershop in a week.

"Using the da Vinci robotic surgical system, we can create very small incisions which means less pain for the patient and faster healing," said Dr. Alrefai. "Many of my patients report little discomfort after surgery and return to normal activities very quickly."

Alvin made the necessary changes to his diet, making sure to get enough protein and not drink too close to a meal, which would fill up his stomach and make eating uncomfortable.

Alvin Tippet Jr.'s severe sleep apnea led his doctor to recommend he lose 100 pounds. Alvin is pictured at left before he met with Sameer Alrefai, MD, bariatric surgeon at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. A year after a gastric sleeve, Alvin has now lost more than 190 pounds.

"I am used to eating and drinking, you know a bite or two and then take a drink, but now I have to wait 30 minutes after eating before I drink," said Alvin, who lost 100 pounds in three months. "And you fill up quickly, so when you feel your stomach getting full, you have to stop eating."

Alvin still enjoys all of his favorite foods, just in much smaller quantities and he admits he does sneak in a fountain soda occasionally, one of his favorite treats. After almost a year, Alvin has lost 192 pounds and shrunk down from a size 50 pants to a size 36-inch waist. Although his new eating patterns had to change, he was amazed to find he was no longer hungry.

"After the procedure, the patient's body produces less ghrelin, which is known as the hunger hormone," said Dr. Alrefai. "Patients like Alvin often find it easier to stick to their new eating habits because they simply aren't as hungry."

Alvin is no longer worried about his sleep apnea and is enjoying a new-found energy.

"My sleep is so much better now that I am not waking up anymore at night," said Alvin. "I feel well rested in the morning, and my knees are better, too."

For anyone thinking about bariatric surgery, Alvin would not hesitate to recommend the procedure and Dr. Alrefai.

"People ask me what my goal is—my goal is to keep the weight off. If I never lost another pound, I am satisfied," said Alvin. "This surgery works—it has changed my life. And Dr. Alrefai is the nicest doctor ever. He really cares about his patients. He's not just my doctor, he's my friend."

The only nationally accredited bariatric surgery program in the Southern Maryland region.

MedStar St. Mary's achieved accreditation from the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program® (MBSAQIP®) in 2022. MBSAQIP® is a joint Quality Program of the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS).

To earn accreditation as a Comprehensive Center, MedStar St. Mary's met essential criteria for staffing, training, facility infrastructure, and patient care pathways, ensuring its ability to support patients with obesity.

MedStar Health Bariatric Surgery at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

Outpatient Pavilion, second floor
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Visit [MedStar Health.org/WeightLoss](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/WeightLoss) or scan the QR code to begin your own journey.



When intense stomach pain leads to surprise surgery

For about a month, upper stomach pain nagged at Mary Ann Jordan. It could largely be ignored until early December—when a debilitating bout pushed her to the Emergency Department at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

Vomiting and in tremendous discomfort, Mary Ann underwent imaging to locate the cause of her severe pain. A CAT scan revealed a mass on her colon, and what began as severe gastrointestinal distress led to an inpatient stay as the team collaborated on next steps.



Mary Ann Jordan

Veronica Marshall, DO, soon arrived to speak to Mary Ann. From the first introduction, Mary Ann says the general surgeon put her at ease by prioritizing communication.

"I never had to wonder about what was going on. She kept me informed about everything—what they were going to do, why we'd done everything we had so far," she shared. "Dr. Marshall explained everything so well."

A colonoscopy and endoscopy were ordered to take a closer look at the growth. Samples were also taken for testing to determine if the mass was cancerous or benign.

While the results of the biopsy were inconclusive, there was no doubt the mass needed to be removed. In early December, Mary Ann underwent a robotic-assisted laparoscopic right hemicolectomy performed by Dr. Marshall at MedStar St. Mary's. In this procedure, the right side of the colon is removed; the remaining healthy colon is then attached directly to the small intestine.

"Robotics is a great tool to have in our belt," said Dr. Marshall. "Using robotic-assisted technology allows the surgeon to



see anatomy in detail that is superior to traditional laparoscopy. It's kinder to patients than traditional large incisions. With smaller incisions, we have less pain, and patients are up and about sooner." In cases such as Mary Ann's, "patients are often discharged in a couple of days."

Mary Ann was impressed by the professionalism of the nursing staff and entire hospital team. Recovery has been "great," with Dr. Marshall pleased by her healing in just a few weeks' time.

While post-operative testing confirmed the mass was cancerous, Mary Ann was optimistic heading into the new year, when she met with an oncologist to determine next steps.

As Mary Ann continued to recover with the support of her daughter and sons, she "couldn't rave enough about Dr. Marshall. She's by far one of the best doctors I've had."



Veronica Marshall, DO

 **MedStar General Surgery at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital**

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Patient takes unique perspective to document cancer treatments

A sole journey

Putting your best foot forward is not always easy when you have to walk a difficult path in life. But when Jan Nave Barnes began her second battle with cancer, that is exactly what she chose to do.

Having survived breast cancer in 2014, Jan, 79, was surprised in May 2019 to learn a mysterious hip pain was stage IV metastatic lung cancer which was already in her left lung, hip, and brain. She began several different treatments, including the immunotherapy infusion Keytruda®. Each time she went in for treatment at MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, she posted photos of herself on Facebook.

"You are just sitting there for several hours, so I decided to have fun with my feet. I have all these different shoes; I guess you could say I have a shoe fetish," said Jan.

Her social media photos included holiday shoes, summer sandals, fancy shoes, patterned shoes, and sometimes cozy boots during cold winter months. The pictures would get numerous likes and often messages of encouragement such as "chin up" or "you go, girl!"

One friend who saw Jan's posts even purchased special shoes for Jan during a trip to India and left them on her porch. Jan saved that pair for her final treatment which happened in January 2023. In February 2023, Jan was given the good news she had



Jan Nave Barnes holds a special pair of shoes she wore and shared on social media on the day of her final cancer treatment. A couple of Jan's Facebook photos below.



been praying for.

"The doctor told me he was taking me off of Keytruda. I thought he was telling me there was nothing else they could do, so I asked him what that meant," said Jan. "He said I was in remission and that I may even be cured. I'm a walking miracle."

Jan's positive attitude was noticed by many, and she was often asked to speak with others who were starting their cancer journeys.

"I have met a lot of people who are going through the same thing I am going through, no two of us are alike," said Jan. "It is a nasty disease. I'd get down every now and then, but I just kept praying that I'd be here long enough to see my grandkids grown and it seems like I'm going to be."



Compassionate cancer care near you.

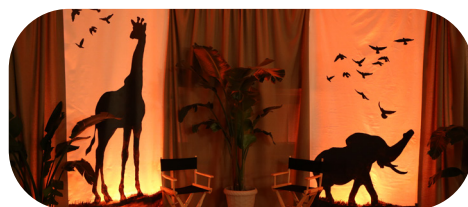
MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute (MGCI) at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital offers patients enhanced access to the latest therapies, research, and clinical trials powered by Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. We work collaboratively to develop a unique treatment plan designed specifically for each patient.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Cancer](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Cancer) or call **301-475-6070** for more information.

WILD!

2023 Gala supported Central Sterile renovations

Our 36th Gala was a WILD success! Benefiting Central Sterile renovations at MedStar St. Mary's, this year's event raised \$403,000 toward these critical updates with \$26,000 pledged live at the event! Congratulations to **Seth Ervin**, raffle winner of gourmet catering courtesy of Ken's Creative Kitchen.



Visit [MedStar Health.org/WILD](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/WILD) for more photos, or to support our non-profit hospital with a philanthropic gift.

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Sydney Clement honored by Maryland Organization of Nurse Leaders

Sydney Clement, BSN, RN, director of nursing (Intensive Care Center [ICC]), MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, was awarded the 2023 DAISY Nurse Leader of the Year Award at the Maryland Organization of Nurse Leaders Annual Gala last November. Nominated for exemplifying servant leadership, Sydney is known for being persistent in her focus on the ICC nursing team's professional growth and wellbeing, in turn shaping quality outcomes for patients entrusted to their care. Sydney leads and participates in several interdisciplinary teams at the system, entity, and unit level within MedStar Health and MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. She is pictured center with MedStar Health Chief Nursing Officer **LynnMarie Verzino, MHA, BSN, RN, NE-BC**, left, and **Lea Ann Carranza, MSN, RN, CNML, CWOCN, PCCN**, director of nursing (Telemetry), MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

Yeitrakis joins CSM Foundation Board

Dawn Yeitrakis, MS, BSN, RN, NEA-BC, vice president and chief nursing officer, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, has joined the College of Southern Maryland (CSM) Foundation Board of Directors. A 1996 CSM alumna, Yeitrakis was praised for "using her 27 years of nursing experience to help shape the college's programs and provide invaluable support for students," said **Toni Kruszka**, interim executive director of the CSM Foundation. "We know that she will bring a valuable perspective to the board and are thrilled to have her as a partner."



Dawn Yeitrakis

Named a 2024 Best Hospital for Maternity Care

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital was named a **2024 Best Hospital for Maternity Care** by *U.S. News & World Report*, earning High Performing marks for Maternity Care (Uncomplicated Pregnancy).

Highlighting our commitment to delivering outstanding patient care to expectant parents and their new arrivals, MedStar St. Mary's was praised for fewer early deliveries, a lower rate of C-sections, fewer newborn complications than other hospitals, and higher rates of breastmilk feeding, among other criteria. Visit [health.usnews.com](https://www.health.usnews.com) to learn more.



Verstandig Pavilion opens at Georgetown

MedStar Georgetown University Hospital opened the doors of the state-of-the-art Verstandig Pavilion in December. The new building features 31 operating rooms, 156 private patient rooms, three levels of underground parking, a rooftop helipad, and acres of relaxing green space. Through MedStar Health's long-standing partnership with Georgetown University, the Verstandig Pavilion advances our work in medical education, training the next generation of physicians, scientists, and caregivers and enhances our research efforts to bring innovative therapies from the laboratory to the patient bedside.

Support groups

Health Connections at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital hosts support groups. Because no registration is required for these, please reach out using the contacts below to verify if meetings are scheduled as planned.

- **Lactation** (every Wednesday, 10 a.m. to noon)
- **Parkinson's** (second Tuesday of each month, 4:30 p.m.)
- **Stroke Survivors** (second Tuesday of each month, 1 p.m.)

Call 301-475-6019 to learn more or register.

Bariatrics

Virtual **Bariatric Support Group** meetings at 10 a.m., second Saturday of each month. Initial registration required. Call 240-434-4088.

Blood drives

March 28, April 25, May 10, May 28, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Health Connections. Register at [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org).

Cancer care

Cancer care support group

Meetings held virtually the first and third Wednesday of each month. Call 240-434-7247 to register, or join "MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Cancer Support Group" on Facebook.

Breast cancer support group

Monthly, virtual. To receive an invite or learn more, please call 301-877-4673. Visit [Facebook.com/groups/MedStarBreastHealthProgram](https://www.facebook.com/groups/MedStarBreastHealthProgram) for support.

Community education

Diabetes Self-Management

Four-week, in-person classes on Mondays. In this self-management program, participants engage in conversations about their experience with diabetes, blood sugar monitoring, healthy eating and activity, and long-term disease management. Call 301-475-6019 to register or learn more.

Take Control of Diabetes

Appointments available to meet one-on-one with a registered dietitian. A provider's order for diabetes education is required. Services may be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most private insurance plans. Call 301-475-6019 for more information.

Women's Wellness Day

Saturday, March 16 • 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Dr. James A. Forrest Career & Technology Center, Leonardtown

Join MedStar St. Mary's Hospital for a free event featuring a variety of speakers and health screenings. Breakfast and refreshments will be provided. No cost; preregistration required. Call 301-475-6019 or scan the QR code to reserve your seat.



Ask the Experts: Quarterly breakfast series

Thursday, May 16 • 9 to 10:30 a.m.
The Blue Heron Café, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital
No cost. Call 301-475-6019 to register.



Childbirth & family education

Parents-to-Be Workshop

In-person classes: April 6 and June 1, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Health Connections, \$100/couple. Combines four traditional parenting classes into a one-day overview. Topics include childbirth, breastfeeding, infant CPR, and practical baby care skills. Virtual options also available. Call 301-475-6019 to register.

Please note: some classes require a minimum number of participants to hold the course. If the need arises to cancel a class, we will make every effort to accommodate you on an alternate date.

Safe Sitter

April 27, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m., in Health Connections, \$65. Adolescents age 12-14 learn babysitting tips, basic first aid, and CPR. Call 301-475-6019 to sign up.

Pulmonary

Quit Tobacco Program

Virtual program to help participants stop using tobacco products. Visit [SMCHD.org/Tobacco](https://www.SMCHD.org/Tobacco) for dates and details.

25500 Point Lookout Rd.
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MedStar St. Mary's Hospital



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Restoring urinary health

Cyndi Madewell was looking for answers. For five months, Cyndi had been experiencing what she believed to be recurring urinary tract infections (UTIs), and when her symptoms began to worsen, she decided to seek help from a specialist. Luckily, Cyndi found urologist **Jordan Luskin, MD**.

During her first appointment, Cyndi explained her symptoms and medical history which included a procedure the previous year to remove part of her colon, as well as ongoing issues with urinary incontinence.

"Many women think they are having urinary tract infections (UTIs), but there are many different reasons that a woman can have pain, increased frequency of urination, incontinence, or a worse sense of urgency," said Dr. Luskin. "Not everything that feels like a UTI is a UTI."

After the initial consultation, Cyndi returned for a simple, painless in-office test called a cystoscopy. The procedure uses a tube with a magnifying scope and camera which allows the doctor to get a better look at the patient's bladder. The test results showed Cyndi's bladder was healthy, and Dr. Luskin suggested she undergo a procedure called



With the help of urologist Jordan Luskin, MD, Cyndi Madewell has found relief from what she believed were chronic urinary tract infections.

Bulkamid® to help with the urinary incontinence that was affecting her day-to-day life.

"Bulkamid is a 15-minute procedure that restores the tissue of the urethra to its natural, healthy state," said Dr. Luskin. "This helps treat certain types of incontinence. It requires no incisions and only numbing medication."

Several weeks after the surgery, Cyndi had an e-visit follow-up with Dr. Luskin.

"He said unless I have a problem, I didn't need to see him again," Cyndi said. "I knew it was working because I was watching a show and I started laughing hysterically which caused a coughing fit and there was not one drip!"

"This patient's story is why I practice medicine," said Dr. Luskin. "The greatest gift is being able to help someone in their time of need. What I love about urology is that we can help people with problems that are very personal. Within the last 10 years, more and more problems can be treated like this story: with a minimally invasive procedure that gets patients back to living their best lives."

**MedStar Urology
at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital**

Outpatient Pavilion, second floor
25500 Point Lookout Road,
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P 240-434-7465

[MedStarHealth.org/Urology](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Urology)

