

Clinician Update

June 26, 2025



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Heat Wave Readiness Continues

This week, at least 18 municipalities in New Jersey posted [record-breaking high temperatures](#) of 101 or hotter. As the very hot, humid weather tapers off, Virtua's emergency departments are ready to assist those in need.

"We expect this weather to continue its dangerous effects upon all our community," said emergency medicine physician Christine Whylings, DO, assistant medical director of the emergency department at Virtua Voorhees Hospital. "The heat will wear down anyone, not just the compromised. Several of our patients worked outdoors, such as construction workers or landscapers. Their symptoms were due to prolonged exposure to this brutal heat and humidity."

Sharing Awareness With Patients

Pulmonologist Eric Szejman, MD, vice president of clinical operations, offered clinicians this advice to share with patients: "Encourage proactive measures: limit outdoor activity during peak hours, maintain adequate hydration, monitor for symptom changes, and review action plans. Stay informed and prepared as the heat intensifies—your clinical vigilance is a critical layer of protection for your patients."

Dr. Whylings added, "As clinicians, we all know the symptoms of heat-related illness. Lightheadedness, excessive sweating, headache, and muscle cramps. Severe signs of illness are confusion, passing out, inability to stop perspiration, or uncontrolled muscle twitching/cramping. For any of these symptoms, they should seek medical attention."

Added Attention to Our Most At-Risk Population

As for the vulnerable, Dr. Szejman reminds clinicians to be aware of the weather's compounding effects, particularly on those with cardiovascular and pulmonary conditions. He added that at-risk populations include older adults, individuals with chronic disease, and those on medications affecting fluid balance or heat tolerance.

"Extreme heat significantly strains both the heart and lungs," said Dr. Szejman. "In cardiac patients, high temperatures increase cardiovascular workload, potentially triggering arrhythmias, exacerbating heart failure, or precipitating myocardial infarction. Medications such as beta-blockers and diuretics may impair thermoregulation and hydration, elevating the risk. Respiratory patients—including those with asthma or COPD—face worsened air quality due to elevated ground-level ozone and fine particulates. These conditions can provoke airway inflammation, reduce oxygen exchange, and lead to decompensation or hospitalization. Dehydration further thickens secretions, compounding airway obstruction."

Research Trial: Backbeat Clinical Investigation Plan

Virtua Research periodically shares trials for your consideration. A brief synopsis of the eligibility criteria is listed below. Physician colleagues are vital to the success of the research program, even when they are not participating as investigators. Darius Sholevar, MD, lead physician, VMG EP Cardiology, is the principal investigator for this trial.

BradyCardia pacemaker With AV Interval Modulation for Blood Pressure Treatment (BACKBEAT) is a prospective, multinational, randomized, double-blind clinical trial evaluating the safety and effectiveness of a novel AV interval modulation (AVIM) algorithm downloaded into a de novo dual-chamber Medtronic pacemaker. The study will be conducted in three phases:

1. Screening/eligibility
2. Double-blind randomized (1 year)
3. Unblinded (2 years)

Patients who are scheduled to undergo implantation of, or already have an implanted, de novo Astra/Azure pacemaker system, who also have uncontrolled hypertension, may be screened for inclusion into this study.

A brief synopsis of the eligibility criteria is listed below.

Inclusion Criteria:

Patient has or is indicated for a de novo dual-chamber pacemaker. The patient's informed consent must be obtained within 30 days prior to a planned de novo implant of a Medtronic Astra/Azure dual chamber pacemaker system or up to 365 days after

Exclusion Criteria:

Known secondary cause of HTN (e.g., renal vascular disease, hyperthyroidism, hyperaldosteronism, pheochromocytoma, and/or other endocrinopathies)

The remaining inclusion/exclusion criteria are extensive and can be shared by reaching out to our research team. If you have a patient who meets the criteria above, please contact the Virtua Research team at research@virtua.org and a research coordinator will review their eligibility with you.

Over 85% of Virtua's Hernia Procedures Now Performed Robotically

It's National Hernia Awareness Month, an opportunity for us to enlighten the public how modern technology has transformed the way we approach hernia repair. Hernias are common, and yet many of those suffering don't seek medical treatment. As we know, an untreated hernia won't go away by itself, and it can lead to an obstruction or even block blood supply if the hernia enlarges. The good news is that the latest technology is available for our patients. Virtua's robotic hernia surgery combines innovative techniques that enable a faster recovery. Over 85% of the hernia procedures performed by Virtua surgeons now utilize the robotic approach.

"Our robotic-assisted hernia repair offers minimally invasive options for repairing any type of hernia or abdominal wall reconstruction," said Craig Zaretsky, MD, chairman of Virtua's department of surgery. "It uses small incisions, so recovery is faster and there's less chance of infection. It allows us to operate with greater precision, resulting in quicker recovery time so our patients can return to their normal activities."

[Read](#) about our most recent robotic hernia repair patient testimonial.

To learn more about our robotic capabilities for general surgery, click [here](#) for one of Virtua's robotics campaign videos.

Practicing Excellence: We Care Compassionately

This week, we continue focusing on the Guiding Principle *WE Care Compassionately*. [Click to view the tip of the week by track.](#)

In Case You Missed It: Message Regarding *Champions of Humanity*

President and CEO Dennis Pullin recently shared a message introducing *Champions of Humanity*—a powerful reaffirmation of who we are and what we stand for.

Champions of Humanity is our way of saying clearly and confidently that doing what is right for our community's health is a moral act. It honors the lived experiences of those we serve and centers our work in the belief that healing begins with humanity.

Click to [view the full message](#) and learn more about all that Virtua is doing by visiting our [website](#).

What Patients Are Saying About Our Clinicians

Confidence in care is a common reference among our clinician reviews. Note the following recent examples and how the patient felt about the experience, and the clinician referenced:

“Dr. Fuseini is wonderful! He is kind and personable. He takes his time to explain things thoroughly and in a way that is easy to understand. He is a great doctor.” (**Nurain Fuseini, MD** – Obstetrics and Gynecology)

“Outstanding primary care provider. Thank you for providing excellent care, guidance, and always listening to my concerns. Thank you for all you do.” (**Beverly Toporowski, MD** – Family Medicine)

“He cares and is personable. I think he is the type of doctor everyone needs. My concerns about my health for years have been his concerns, and I am grateful to have such a caring physician as Dr. Thomas Plut. He treats me like family.” (**Thomas Plut, DO** – Sports Medicine)

“From the first time I walked in the door, I was treated with care and compassion. She listened to me when I told her how I felt and what I was

dealing with in my life. She made me feel relieved and showed sincere concern.”
(**Ashley Thomas, APN** – Family Medicine)

“Office staff was wonderful. Dr. Roccato was fabulous! Wonderful doctor! She puts you at ease immediately and I am so happy to have found her!” (**Mary Kathryn Roccato, MD** – Gastroenterology)

Summer HeartTalk Magazine Now in Homes

HeartTalk is a quarterly magazine mailed to 127,000 households in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties. It aims to guide readers to follow a healthy lifestyle with expert advice on preventing and managing cardiovascular disease, weight management, and improving lung, digestive, reproductive, and emotional health—and much more.

Special thanks to the following clinicians participating in the summer 2025 issue: Murray Buck, DO; Jacqueline Riedel, DO; Charles Snyder, MD; Minda A. Green, MD; Alexander Berger, MD; Ibrahim Moussa, DO; Tyler Veterano, DO; Michelle Hunt, PsyD; Ameer Dharia, DO; and Brian Flynn, DO.

Click [here](#) to read the digital version of the magazine. To view past issues, visit [here](#).

Virtua in the News

Non-Punitive Workplace Culture a Must for Patient Safety

Jennifer Khelil, DO, EVP and chief clinical officer, discussed how a work environment that supports the sharing of safety concerns, without fear of punishment, helps keep patients safe.

“Staff members must feel comfortable bringing these concerns to leadership,” she explained. “If the culture is punitive, people are not going to speak up.”
Read in [HealthLeaders](#).

How Generative AI Can Assist Health Care Marketing

Chrisie Scott, SVP and chief marketing officer, discussed her team’s use of generative AI to support Virtua’s marketing efforts—from developing social media posts to creating first drafts of headlines or email subject lines.

However, she notes the technology “still needs strong human supervision.” For example, AI-generated content “can sound polished but miss the mark

emotionally or contextually.”

“We never want to compromise trust and authenticity for convenience,” Chrisie emphasized. “The key for us is to use [AI] responsibly and discuss its applications regularly to accelerate our collective learning.” Read in [Becker’s Health IT](#).

Bridging Gaps in South Jersey and Beyond

Celebrating 25 years with Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes, Rose Caraballo shares with Virtua President & CEO Dennis Pullin her journey from family liaison to an interpreter for the early intervention program. In this role, Rose bridges communication gaps so that clinicians and our youngest patients can fully understand each other.

But there is more to Rose than what’s on her Virtua ID. She and her husband have opened their home and hearts to more than 40 foster children from other countries who have been separated from their families. In the latest *Here for Good: Inside Edition*, Rose highlights the joy of introducing them to new experiences and encouraging others to consider fostering and offering loving homes to children in need.

[Click to view the episode.](#)

Virtua Health “By the Numbers”

We all know Virtua has five hospitals. But, if you ever need to know how many particular centers, labs, or EMS service units comprise our system, you can find all that and more in one place. The slide is available [here](#) on Brand Hub should you need it for any reason, such as a presentation. It is regularly updated, and if you have any questions regarding it, reach out to VirtuaClinician@virtua.org.

From the Hello Good Mailbox

Congratulations to Virtua-affiliated ambulatory surgery center, Advanced Surgical Institute (ASI) in Sewell. The team celebrated 1,000 5-star reviews with a food truck and prizes for their team. ASI specializes in orthopedic, spine, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, and pain management procedures. For a picture of the proud team, click [here](#) on LinkedIn.



Virtua Health

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