

Clinician Update

December 21, 2023

New Masking Requirements at Virtua – Effective Immediately

Yesterday, Reg Blaber, MD, EVP and chief clinical officer, shared the following message regarding the return of masking during patient encounters and when meeting with colleagues in closed spaces (break rooms, meeting rooms, etc.)— effective immediately. Please see his message below:

“Like it or not, the ‘triple-demic’ is upon us! As we approach the holidays, you undoubtedly will notice those around you becoming ill with COVID, RSV, or the flu. Each day, more and more colleagues are calling out ill with respiratory infections, almost certainly related to these viruses.

“This new variant of COVID, JN-1, is more infectious than any of the previous strains. The infectious disease community has also noted that it seems more likely to result in hospitalizations amongst those who are immunocompromised. This is evidenced by the increasing number of individuals presenting with COVID to our emergency departments and physician offices.

“What is different about this moment is that influenza and RSV are also rising rapidly. Between the three viruses, all of our hospitals are at or approaching capacity, and we haven’t even gotten to the height of holiday gatherings yet!

“This ‘triple-demic’ and the impact that it is having on our workforce's health and hospital capacity is forcing us to reinstitute masking during patient encounters and when meeting with colleagues in closed spaces (break rooms, meeting rooms, etc.)—effective immediately. At this time, this will not apply to visitors, but we will strongly encourage them to mask up for the safety of their loved ones.

“I am sure you are all expressing a collective ‘Ugh!’ at this new mandate. We all feel the same way. However, our first goal is to always be here for good, for each other and our patients. That starts with creating an environment that is safe for all of us, our patients, and their families.”

Virtua’s Pulmonology & Sleep Medicine Services Expand North to Trenton

This past week, Virtua Medical Group (VMG) welcomed Virtua Pulmonology & Sleep Medicine – Trenton to its network, bringing these important services to New Jersey’s capital.

Pulmonologist Marc Seelagy, MD, heads the practice. He was ICU director for 30 years at St. Francis Medical Center, as well as the medical director of the sleep program there. His career has been centered on achieving the best for his patients. “I love being able to understand and figure out what has gone wrong, and how to solve it, all the while educating the patient about the issue and the thoughts behind the plan of action to address their care.”

“Dr. Seelagy has won numerous ‘Top Doctor’ accolades through the years—frankly, too many to count,” said Eric Szejman, MD, pulmonologist and VP of clinical operations for the Virtua Medical Group. “This is very exciting knowing what he and his staff will now be offering our patients.”

Virtua Vascular Surgery Completes 50th TCAR at Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital

Just one year after starting its Transcarotid Artery Revascularization (TCAR) program, Virtua vascular surgery has completed its 50th TCAR procedure. The program started with a collaboration between Michael Lieb, DO, a vascular surgeon at Virtua Surgical Group, and Omar Choudhri, MD, a cerebrovascular neurosurgeon with the Penn Medicine Virtua Health Neurosciences Program.

“Virtua vascular surgery continues to offer the latest in care to our patients,” said Dr. Lieb, who also serves as medical director of The Vein Center at Virtua & Non-Invasive Vascular Lab. “TCAR was originally designed for patients who are at higher risk of surgical complications due to age, medical comorbidities, or anatomical issues. It is now offered to appropriate standard-risk patients as well. This allows us to maximize both surgical outcomes as well as the patients experience.”

TCAR is a clinically proven treatment option for carotid artery disease. It is a patient friendly hybrid endovascular procedure and incorporates the neuroprotection principals of carotid endarterectomy and the less invasive nature of carotid stents. It utilizes a system that temporarily reverses blood flow away from the brain, collecting any potential debris in the device filter, before returning the blood to a vessel in the leg. With reverse flow neuroprotection established, a stent is then implanted in the lesion for long term plaque stabilization and stroke prevention.

To learn more about TCAR, [click here for an article in HeartTalk](#).

Virtua Is “All In” on Excellence

Thank you for being *All In on Excellence*! This week, we continue in second chapter of our *All In* program “Everyone Matters.” With your team or on your own, view the fourth tip of the series: “Idea Exchange” Click to [view the tip](#).

It is critical that all colleagues who have not yet completed the Patient Experience Certification Program make doing so a priority before Dec. 31.

Visit the [Practicing Excellence page](#) on the Colleague Corner to view and share the Patient Experience tips with your teams.

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:

“Been seeing her for years, and I don't plan on ever leaving her. She listens to you, is very empathetic and I feel like she actually cares. Never felt judged by her. She even called after her business hours just to go over labs with me.” (Cortney Griffin, APN)

“She is the reason I’m a Virtua patient.” (Jean Davidson, DO)

“He has been my primary care doctor for 35 years. His expertise in all areas of medicine, loyalty, and dedication to his patients is and continues to be his number one priority. Thank you, Dr. Piccone, you're one of a kind!” (Dennis Piccone, DO)

“She listens keenly to what I have to say and is thorough in her examinations. She takes time to discuss my medical problems with me and the treatments she is recommending. She promptly answers any queries I may send her on MyChart regarding test results and does not hesitate in referring me to relevant specialists if she believes it is necessary. I consider her to be a caring, considerate PCP who is one in a million! Her professionalism is beyond reproach.” (Letitia Price, MD)

“Always treated with dignity and respect for the over 10 years I've been her patient!” (Adaora Udoh, MD)

Recognition Continues for Virtua Primary Care - Linwood

Congratulations to Virtua Primary Care – Linwood for its earned loyalty from the community. *The Press of Atlantic City*, the primary newspaper for southeastern New Jersey and the Jersey Shore, recently posted its popular annual “Best of the Press” edition, where its readers vote on categories such as “Best Medical in Atlantic and Cape May Counties.” Virtua Primary Care – Linwood won “Best Family Practice (Silver).” It is the 5th straight year the practice has been recognized in the newspaper.

“We have such a great staff,” said Richard Kader, DO, lead physician of the practice. “I am extremely proud of all their efforts, year in and year out. This says so much about the quality of work given to our patients, and the community perennially has noticed.”

Working to Improve Early Outcomes Following Total Knee Arthroplasty

Sean McMillan, DO, sports medicine surgeon at Virtua Orthopedics & Spine, was the primary investigator in a multicenter study that sought to investigate the effects of a topical plant-based polysaccharide (PSP) as an adjunctive hemostat to minimize blood loss and improve early clinical outcomes in patients undergoing primary total knee replacement.

“This was a landmark collaboration for us at Virtua and our patients,” said Dr. McMillan, working alongside other top investigators nationally. “The outcomes show that by using this technique, the team was able to minimize postoperative swelling and improve range of motion within the first 10 to 14 days for our total knee patients.”

To view the abstract, click [here](#).

Virtua Prescription Coverage Transitions to OptumRx

Effective **Jan. 1, 2024**, Virtua prescription coverage enrollees and their dependents will transition to OptumRx for their pharmacy benefits, replacing CVS Caremark. This change aims to enhance the customer experience with pharmacy benefits.

Additionally, Virtua has partnered with RxBenefits, a dedicated concierge service, to support all pharmacy benefit inquiries. Colleagues can reach the RxBenefits Member Services Team from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., by calling 800-334-8134, or emailing CustomerCare@RxBenefits.com.

Key points to note during this transition include:

- All colleagues and their dependents will be issued new OptumRx ID cards for 2024.
- Current pre-authorizations and remaining medication refills will be transferred to OptumRx automatically.
- You may use any retail pharmacy that accepts your OptumRx plan when filling short-term and 90-day prescriptions (including, but not limited to, CVS, Walgreens, and Rite Aid).
- The Virtua Specialty Pharmacy (VSP), located at the Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Berlin, will provide specialty medications under the Virtua medical and prescription benefit. For more information, contact VSP at 856-322-3080.

Virtua in the News

Virtua Voorhees Recognized Among Top 132 Hospitals Nationwide

Hospital-ranking organization The Leapfrog Group has honored Virtua Voorhees with its Top Hospital Award. Recognized in the category of “Top Teaching Hospitals,” Virtua Voorhees is one of just nine New Jersey facilities to make the list. The awards identify hospitals that demonstrate the highest performance in quality and patient safety. Read in [Becker’s Hospital Review](#) and [Chief Healthcare Executive](#).

Virtua Earns Prestigious Awards for Health Care and Medical Marketing

Virtua has received [gold, silver, bronze, and merit Health Care Digital Marketing Awards](#) from the HRM Publications Group for our work on a variety of projects, including the “Here for Good: Inside Edition” podcast, 360-Degree Physician Video Series, and the Virtua Health College of Medicine & Life Sciences of Rowan University event.

Rowan-Virtua Medical Student Helps Discover Her Own Cancer

Going to medical school may have saved Sally Rohan's life. During her first year at Rowan-Virtua School of Osteopathic Medicine, she and classmates learned how to perform ultrasounds by practicing on each other. That’s when Rohan noticed her thyroid looked “bumpy.” Her finding led to a thyroid cancer

diagnosis and treatment. Rohan's experience will give her "a lot more empathy" toward her future patients, she says. Read or watch on [Good Morning America](#) and [CNN](#).

Partnership with Medtronic Seeks to Improve Camden Residents' Health

Healthy Neighbor, a joint program by Medtronic LABS and Virtua, aims to improve health outcomes in Camden. As part of the program, community health workers visit patients in their homes and use a LABS technology platform to help monitor patients' health. This innovative program uses multiple approaches to reduce health disparities in a sustainable and scalable way. Read in [CRWE World](#).

Virtua Recognized for Strong Finances

A prominent industry publication has identified Virtua among "68 health systems with strong finances." It notes that Virtua has a high, "AA-" rating and stable outlook with Fitch, a top credit-rating agency. The rating is supported by Virtua's leading market position and the successful integration of Lourdes Health System, the article notes. Read in [Becker's Hospital Review](#).

Breaking News: Xfinity Hit by a Cybersecurity Breach

Comcast's residential cable unit, Xfinity, has been hit by a cybersecurity breach in which hackers exploiting a critical vulnerability dubbed "[Citrix Bleed](#)" accessed the confidential information of nearly 36 million customers. It is recommended that anyone who uses Xfinity should reset their password and enable [multi-factor authentication](#).

Looking Back on a Remarkable Year

In case you missed it, President and CEO Dennis Pullin shared a special holiday message with all colleagues:

"As the holiday season continues to unfold, I hope you will take time for yourself in the days ahead to reflect and recharge. I find myself grateful for our Virtua family and for your compassion and creativity in navigating 2023—a year filled with connections, innovation, partnerships, and possibilities.

"Our [2023 Highlights](#) video may be our longest ever, and yet it still only showcases a sprinkling of all the good that we created together. In fact, some of the most significant things we do are the most difficult to fully capture—such as being deeply present with a patient during a vulnerable moment or seeing the good in each and every person we encounter and making their day a little better.

"Something I've particularly enjoyed this year has been my ["Here for Good: Inside Edition"](#) podcast conversations. These exchanges with colleagues throughout Virtua have reminded me of what a unique, talented, and dedicated workforce we have. There is no question, we are surrounded by the best people.

“In the spirit of appreciation, I wish you happy and joyous holidays and a hopeful beginning to what I know will be another year of purpose and progress.”

Delivering the Healing Power of Music Now and Year Round

The healing power of live music, especially this time of the year, can be so worthwhile. And it's good to know this availability flows into the new year.

Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital will have another great year ahead with in-person, bedside performances by [Musicians on Call \(MOC\)](#), the nonprofit organization that has performed to more than 10,000 patients, staff and visitors at the hospital in over a dozen years of performances.

While the in-person program is held at Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes, you should know that every week there is an [ongoing virtual program](#) available on Wednesdays, as well as a Spanish-language virtual program on Tuesdays. Want to know more? Email VirtuaClinician@virtua.org.

And as a special holiday present, Musicians on Call has produced [Hope for the Holidays](#), a festive virtual concert filled with performances of holiday favorites and warm greetings from some of the brightest stars in music, including Lindsey Stirling, Switchfoot, Johnnyswim, Fitz & the Tantrums, Girl Named Tom, Straight No Chaser, Jesse McCartney, Jenna Raine, Marc Roberge of O.A.R., Gin Blossoms, Russell Dickerson, and many more, hosted by Forest Blakk. Blakk has also curated merry melodies always [just a click away here](#).

The program is available for all Virtua patients and caregivers, **now through Tuesday, Jan. 2 at 11:59 pm**. Use hospital code **lourdes** to access [from here](#). Wanna host a watch party? Sharing it among friends in the break room? Let us know and share some pics we can use on Virtua's social channels. Email them to VirtuaClinician@virtua.org.

With the new year approaching, MOC is lining up performers to provide live music at Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. The program can use a fresh supply of volunteer guides. Would you, or someone you know, want to be a part of the healing power of music? The 90 minute in-person programs are usually held once a week in the early evening.

Volunteers are needed to escort the musicians, communicate with staff and patients, and heighten the MOC experience. Volunteers will know the protocols, policies and expectations and are responsible for making sure these guidelines are upheld during the shift.

To learn more on how to apply, visit <https://www.musiciansoncall.org/most-important-gig/>

Share Your 2023 Community Benefit Activities

The community health engagement team needs your help in capturing system-wide community benefit activities to maintain compliance for Virtua's nonprofit/tax exempt status. Community benefit activities are programs and services designed to address unmet community health needs, improve health in communities, and increase access to health care. [Click here to learn more](#).

If you participated in or organized community-benefit activities, please contact Tina Bortner, educator of community health engagement, at cermertbortner@virtua.org. The team will answer your questions and add Virtua contributors to the Community Benefit channel on Teams to access the annual reporting spreadsheet. Thank you in advance for helping to fulfill our community benefit obligations.

IDEA – Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity for All

It's wonderful to recognize and celebrate the diversity of winter holidays around the world.

[Winter Solstice or Yule](#), celebrated **Dec. 21**, is one of the oldest winter celebrations around the world.

[Christmas](#), celebrated on **Dec. 25**, holds religious significance for Christians as the birth of Jesus Christ. It's also celebrated secularly by many around the world, with diverse traditions and customs that bring families and communities together.

[Kwanzaa](#), beginning **Dec. 26** and lasts for seven days, is inspired by African harvest celebrations. It's a time to honor African heritage, reflect on African American culture, and celebrate community, family, and culture.

Have a Happy and Restful Holiday Season

Because of the upcoming holiday week, there will not be an issue of *Clinician Update* next Thursday, Dec. 28. The editors wish you a safe, healthy holiday. We hope you get to have some needed time off to refresh. We will see you again in 2024!