

Clinician Update December 5, 2024

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Virtua Medical Group Surpasses 2 Million Encounters

It's an achievement well worth celebrating! [VMG reached 2 million patient encounters](#) just before Thanksgiving, fueled by a 65% increase in volume over the past five years. This was made possible by an 86% increase in the clinician workforce over that time span. VMG now consists of more than 1,500 clinicians at approximately 400 primary and specialty care practices.

"This says so much about our clinicians and staff," said Sam Weiner, MD, VMG chief medical officer. "What I am most proud of is how this milestone represents our community's trust and loyalty in us."

"From access to readiness to quality of service, VMG continues to heighten our commitment to the community," said Rebecca Lynch, RN BSN, MHA, president of VMG and SVP of Virtua Health. "What is so important to us is that, while over 2 million is an incredible number, it will always represent for us the dedication of one patient encounter and experience at a time. Congratulations to all the hard work of so many in serving our patients."

Virtua Earns Award for Early Lung-Cancer Detection

The [Eon Center of Excellence](#) recently presented Virtua with its "Excellence in Early Detection" award for finding and treating lung cancer early.

While New Jersey and national averages for early-stage lung cancer diagnosis are just 27.7% and 26.6% of cases, respectively, Virtua's rate is 52.2%. That means more than half of Virtua patients with lung cancer are diagnosed at the earliest, most curable stages: 1 or 2.

"I'm incredibly proud of Virtua's accomplishment, which is saving lives across South Jersey," said thoracic surgeon Matthew Puc, MD, medical director of the Penn Medicine | Virtua Health Cancer Program.

As part of this effort, Virtua has increased the number of lung screenings it performs by more than 20% since last year, with more than 1,400 screenings projected for 2024. The organization also uses innovative, AI-based technology to support early detection, diagnosis, and treatment. Read more in our [press release](#).

Virtua Receives High Honors from Practicing Excellence

Virtua's remarkable year with partner Practicing Excellence recently got even better with the presentation of two awards during the latter's annual CONNECT conference. Virtua received the Center for Excellence Award, the highest honor Practicing Excellence bestows, while Virtua Mount Holly emergency room physician Roy Shubert, MD, was named Clinician Coach of the Year.

"I have been very fortunate to have some great mentors who taught me the art of medicine and how to connect with both patients and their families. Now, I find myself that mentor, who can coach other colleagues, making me a better physician," Dr. Shubert said. "I am grateful to Practicing Excellence for selecting me as a Clinician Coach of the Year, and I will continue to dedicate myself to helping my peers recognize and advance their skills."

The CONNECT conference also featured several Virtua leaders. Dr. John Matsinger, chief clinical officer, spoke as part of the Executive Panel on the state of health care and future priorities. Other Virtua leaders, including Chief Marketing Officer Chrisie Scott, offered their expertise in a case study about how Practicing Excellence prioritizes reconnecting with purpose.

Clinician Coaching at Virtua

Virtua's Practicing Excellence clinician coaching program is about continuous learning, confidence-building, and empowerment. It is about creating safe spaces for growth—where colleagues can express concerns, seek support, and become even better versions of themselves. The certified coaches have developed communication, analytical, and relational skills that make them effective patient experience coaches.

“As a clinician coach, our intent is to help each other develop skills to connect with patients and colleagues along with being your best selves,” said Virtua emergency medicine physician Douglas Stranges, DO, a certified Practicing Excellence clinician coach. “Because at the end of the day, we’re all in this together, in this shared vocation of caring.”

[In this video, Dr. Stranges talks about the merits of the program.](#)

If you would welcome someone to talk to, to share the challenges that you are facing in your daily grind, to be a guiding two-way mirror so to help get you closer to the clinician you want to be, don’t hesitate to reach out to a certified clinician coach. Perhaps you might prefer advice from a non-clinician certified coach? That option is available as well. All the coaches are sincere and want to help. They are not here to judge, but to assist.

If interested, email PEClinicianCoaches@virtua.org or go to the Colleague Corner. Under the clinical tab, select the Human Experience Resource Center, which features more information on requesting a coach.

Practicing Excellence: Turning Conflict Into Opportunity

This week’s “Best of the Best” Practicing Excellence tip dives into a common challenge: dealing with non-team players.

Tip: How to Approach a Non-Team Player

Click to watch: [What Teams Say About Each Other Tip #4: How to Approach a Non-Team Player](#)

Keith Abruzzese, AVP of rehabilitation services, shares valuable insights on how to respond to these situations with respect and intention:

“I selected this tip in part because it is delivered by an occupational therapist, and I am fortunate to lead a great team of OTs here at Virtua. Throughout my career, I’ve learned that conflict is not inherently a bad thing. In fact, conflict is often fundamental for recognizing and acting upon an opportunity for operational improvement or personal growth. What’s important is that we approach conflict in a respectful, well-intentioned way, which is what this tip is all about.”

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:

“I have all the confidence in the world in her. I always joke with my friends about putting Dr. Channell in a genie lamp and taking her with me when I leave. The care is just that good.” **(Millicent K. Channell, DO)**

“He explains everything in a way that I understand. I am very glad that I am under his care. I trust him and that is very important to me.” **(Luai Tabaza, MD)**

“She was spot-on with my diagnosis and treatment. She was kind, attentive, professional, and extremely knowledgeable. I appreciate all the time she took to listen to me and give me extremely helpful advice.”
(Tova M. Diamond, PA)

“He is very caring and knowledgeable in what he does. I trust him very much with my back issues, and each time I see him for a procedure, I get more and more relief. You can't go wrong in trusting him with your care.” **(Connor McElligott, MD)**

“Wonderful physician and practice! Caring, professional, and kind. Listens to your problems and comes up with doable solutions! I would recommend Dr. Burke and this whole practice to everyone!” **(Hana Burke, MD)**

Clinician Feedback Sought for Improving Social Determinants of Health

The South Jersey Health Collaborative (SJHC), of which Virtua is a member, is asking for your feedback in this 10-15 minute [Key Stakeholder Survey](#). The goal is to learn more about strengths, barriers, and opportunities for improving health and social determinants of health across South Jersey. Your responses will help SJHC identify resources, strengths, and opportunities for collaboration and collective action. All responses are anonymous.

The data collected will be an important component of the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) conducted by the South Jersey Health Collaborative. All the data gathered from this survey and other methods will be available for free on the websites of each SJHC member in 2025. **The survey will be open for participation through Jan. 17, 2025.**

Click [here](#) for the survey and thank you for your time and participation.

Meet Dr. Adam Ferin, Medical Detective

For Adam Ferin, MD, the *MD* stands for *Doctor of Medicine* as well as *Medical Detective*. A skilled infectious disease physician, Dr. Ferin sits down with President and CEO Dennis Pullin and shares his passion for unraveling medical mysteries. His detective-like approach to diagnosing complex illnesses, coupled with his dedication to patient care, has earned him the respect of colleagues and the gratitude of his patients. A recent highlight of his career was the timely diagnosis of cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Dan Choi's wife, which proved to be a lifesaver. Learn more by watching the [latest episode of Here for Good: Inside Edition](#).

Get to Know Dr. Syed Ali Riaz

As an interventional pulmonologist, Syed Ali Riaz, MD, cares for those who have lung and airway diseases. He treats his patients as if they are family and strives to have them feeling better and breathing better. “Nothing is more rewarding than that,” he said. When he’s not caring for patients, Dr. Riaz loves spending time with his three kids and doing as many fun activities as possible.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Dr. Riaz.

Virtua in the News

Walking Pneumonia at High Levels

This respiratory illness has increased locally and nationwide, with rates especially high in young children. The uptick has been caused by a bacteria called mycoplasma pneumoniae, which infects the throat and can spread to the lungs.

"As people spend more time in closer proximity around the holidays, it is likely to spread," said Rashida Shakir, MD assistant medical director of CHOP at Virtua within Virtua Mount Holly Hospital. Watch on [CBS3](#).

Parents' Guide for Teaching Hygiene to Kids

Taking care of one's body is an important skill that helps children stay healthy and feel more confident. Mary Campagnolo, MD, medical director at Virtua Primary Care – Mansfield, provided a range of tips to help parents teach good hygiene to their children, from toddlerhood through puberty. Read in [New Jersey Family](#).

Upcoming Events

Virtua Holiday Gatherings Start Next Week

Check out the [detailed schedule](#) for our Holiday Gatherings. We look forward to everyone coming together to connect, share, and enjoy a festive meal. Feel free to attend the gathering at the campus closest to you. Let's come together as one big Virtua family and make the season memorable.

Shop With a Virtua Doctor

Dec. 11, 5:30 p.m.

ShopRite of Williamstown

Join Virtua cardiologist Joshua Crasner, DO, and registered dietitian Claire Rudden, RDN, for an evening of heart health information and grocery shopping tips. Attendees will learn how to select the healthiest food options during this holiday season. Click to [view the flyer](#). To RSVP for the event or learn more information, email virtuaclinician@virtua.org.

Cardiology Grand Rounds - Pulmonary Hypertension, Dec. 18

The next cardiology grand rounds will center on pulmonary hypertension. The virtual event will take place on Wednesday, Dec. 18, from 7 to 8 a.m., and will feature Kerri Akaya Smith, MD. Dr. Smith is clinical director of the pulmonary hypertension/ pulmonary vascular disease program at Penn Medicine.

The pulmonologist is an associate professor of clinical medicine specializing in pulmonary, allergy, and critical care. To join the event, click [here](#).

IDEA – Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity for All

[International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#) was established on Dec. 3, 1992 to usher awareness and recognition of visible and invisible disabilities. Actions to ensure equitable and inclusive practices for people with disabilities have been promoted by the United Nations since the 1940s, specifically with the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. From this came International Human Rights Day, observed annually on **Dec. 10**.

Virtua's Achieving Better Life Equity (VisABLE) Colleague Community welcomes colleagues who are neurodivergent, differently-abled, or have special needs to share knowledge, be celebrated, and inspire others to be VisABLE. Allies are also encouraged to join and contribute to a more inclusive workplace. To learn more and participate, email VisABLECommittee@virtua.org.

Additionally, **Dec. 8** is [Bodhi Day](#), celebrated by those who observe around the world to commemorate the day it is said that Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama, experienced enlightenment.