

Clinician Update

November 16, 2023

Virtua Opens New Center to Expand Access to Heart Failure Care

Virtua recently opened an Advanced Heart Failure Center within Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. This location will serve as both a hub for *advanced* heart failure care and an additional outpatient site, joining Virtua's well-established heart failure sites in Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties.

"Our goal is to help patients with heart failure live their healthiest possible life," said Tolulope Agunbiade, MD, medical director of Virtua's Advanced Heart Failure Program. "We like to say that we deal in heart function, not heart failure. Our care teams work collaboratively to ensure they receive appropriate guideline-directed medical therapy and pursue any additional diagnostic or therapeutic interventions that can help improve their condition and health."

Opening this advanced center heightens Virtua's longstanding history of caring for heart failure patients in southern New Jersey and improves access for those living with heart failure in the City of Camden and beyond.

"We are excited to be able to offer these services closer to home for so many people," said Dr. Agunbiade.

The center also provides a base for Virtua's expanding left ventricular assist device (LVAD) program. Currently, Virtua cares for patients with existing LVADs and participates in "shared care" of LVAD patients. This means patients diagnosed with end-stage heart failure are referred to a regional implanting center to receive their heart pump and then returned to the care of their local cardiologist.

"Our goal is to offer LVAD implantation right here at Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes in the near future," said Theresa Rowe, Virtua's administrative director of heart failure.

To refer patients, please contact the Advanced Heart Failure Center at 856-886-6888.

Virtua Reaches Organ Transplant Surgery Milestone

The Virtua Advanced Transplant & Organ Health team recently successfully completed its 100th organ transplant in 2023.

"This milestone represents hope, resilience, teamwork, and the gift of new beginnings," said Christine Palms, vice president of the transplant service line. "And we're beyond proud to offer these life-changing procedures to our neighbors in South Jersey."

The milestone surpasses last year's total of 82 and is the highest in the history of the program. It also marks the third year in a row for record transplant volume.

“It says so much about the surgical expertise and advanced capabilities of our transplant surgeons and the clinical team,” said Palms. “We are blessed here at Virtua.”

To learn more about organ transplantation at Virtua, click [here](#).

Virtua Mount Holly Hospital Achieves Magnet Recognition

Congratulations to **Virtua Mount Holly Hospital** for achieving [Magnet Recognition](#) through the American Nurses Credentialing Center. This recognition represents the highest level of excellence that a nursing program can attain in the United States, with only [10% of the nation’s hospitals](#) having earned Magnet-recognized status.

Virtua Mount Holly now joins **Virtua Marlton Hospital** in receiving this exemplary status, which they accomplished less than two months ago. For our valued patients, this signifies that they receive the very best care delivered by exceptional nurses in the field.

Honoring Our Nurse Practitioners

It’s National Nurse Practitioner Week, a time set aside to celebrate these exceptional clinicians and the professionalism they provide to patients. At Virtua, there are hundreds of NPs serving throughout the organization.

“Nurse practitioners are vital to our continuum of care,” said Sam Weiner, MD, vice president and chief medical officer of Virtua Medical Group. “Their expertise and dedication are evident in the trust our patients place in them, and their service is integral to the quality of care we provide. To all of you, thank you!”

“During this week when we recognize nurse practitioners, I would like to share my gratitude for all that you do for our Virtua community and beyond,” said Catherine Hughes, MSN, MHA, RN, NEA-BC, senior vice president and chief nursing officer of Virtua Health. “Because of you, we have greater access to care and the knowledge we need to improve health. You are vital and valuable members of the care team. Thank you!”

Last Call - Successfully Treat Patient Obesity: A Comprehensive Approach, Nov. 18

Virtua’s bariatric surgery program has planned a learning opportunity for interested clinicians this **Saturday, Nov. 18** at the Barry Brown Health Education Center in Voorhees. The event is entitled [“Successfully Treat Patient Obesity: A Comprehensive Approach”](#) and will feature metabolic and bariatric experts Samuel Wasser, MD, FACS, FASMBS; Emeka Acholonu, MD, FACS, FASMBS; Gaurav Sharma, MD, FACS, FASMBS; Srikanth Parsi, MD, FACS; and Michelle Hunt, Psy.D, LCADC.

To register for this event, please go to the Virtua Learning System (VLS) on the Colleague Corner and search for “Successfully Treat Patient Obesity.” Click [here](#) for a flyer which includes the accreditation

statement. CME is available for VMG and VIN clinicians who attend. For further information please contact Lisa Shaw, director of digestive health, at lshaw@virtua.org or 856-355-0877.

Antibiotic Awareness Week, Nov. 18 to 24

U.S. Antibiotic Awareness Week is an annual observance that raises awareness of the threat of antibiotic resistance and the importance of improving antibiotic prescribing and use. At Virtua Health, we use this time to spotlight our Antimicrobial Stewardship Program (ASP), whose mission it is to target these same principles.

ASP works year-round to promote appropriate antibiotic use, prioritize patient safety, and minimize antibiotic resistance in our hospitals. Jessica Colmerauer, PharmD, BCIDP, infectious diseases clinical pharmacy specialist, answers a few questions below about one of the programs main initiatives—penicillin allergy assessment:

How does having a listed penicillin allergy impact care? Patients with reported penicillin allergies are more likely to receive suboptimal therapy and experience negative outcomes, including increased length of stay and increased risk of surgical site infection. Alternative therapies to beta-lactams, such as clindamycin and fluoroquinolones, carry a higher risk of causing *C. difficile* infection. Efforts to clarify penicillin allergies with patients can positively influence future care, even beyond the current hospital admission.

What is the best way to clarify penicillin allergies with patients? The best way to clarify these allergies is through conversation with the patient, family, and/or caregiver(s). The following few questions can offer valuable context. Documenting important details in the Epic allergy section can help other clinicians make critical decisions in the future.

- What drug was your reaction to?
- What was the reaction you experienced?
- When did you experience the reaction?
- Have you ever taken a similar medication since you had this reaction?

For patients with true penicillin allergies, what beta-lactams can be used safely? Many patients with true penicillin allergies can still safely receive cephalosporin therapy. Current recommendations from the allergy societies AAAAI & ACAAI endorse that patients with non-anaphylactic penicillin allergies can receive any cephalosporin normally. For patients with a history of anaphylactic penicillin allergy, first generation oral cephalosporins such as cephalexin and cefadroxil should be avoided, but all formulary IV cephalosporins and 2nd/3rd generation oral cephalosporins can be used safely.

For more information on penicillin allergies, including a guideline for using cephalosporins in penicillin allergy, [click here for the Antimicrobial Stewardship webpage](#).

Caring for Those With Pancreatic Cancer

Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month is an opportunity to continue the conversation about risk factors and advanced treatments at Virtua.

“Unfortunately, there are no early warning signs or screenings for pancreatic cancer,” said medical oncologist and hematologist Seth Berk, MD. “Because the pancreas is buried deep within the body, symptoms can be easily missed. They can include belly or back pain, diabetes, nausea, and vomiting. Depending on the tumor’s location, one may develop jaundice when the tumor is at the head of the pancreas, or sudden weight loss when the tumor is lower on the pancreas. If a person’s weight suddenly drops by 15 pounds for no apparent reason, it’s cause to investigate.”

The average age for pancreatic cancer diagnosis is 71, according to Dr. Berk. “Family history certainly plays a role. If there is an incidence of chronic or hereditary pancreatitis, smoking, obesity, or long-standing diabetes, these can all increase risk and should be proactively managed when possible.” For anyone with a family history of cancer, Virtua offers [genetic testing and counseling](#), which includes telehealth visits with a licensed genetic counselor.

Pancreatic cancer treatment depends on the stage and location of the tumor. Virtua’s multidisciplinary team includes board-certified hepatobiliary surgeons, [interventional gastroenterologists](#), and experts from the [Penn Medicine | Virtua Health Cancer Program](#), including medical oncologists and radiation oncologists. The team collaborates to develop each patient’s plan which may include a combination of radiation, proton therapy, chemotherapy, or immunotherapy—all of which are provided in South Jersey. Through the Penn Medicine | Virtua Health Cancer Program, patients also have access to national clinical trials.

This Week’s Practicing Excellence Tip

Thank you for being *All In on Excellence*! We are now in the third week of our new program and the third tip of the series: “I Belong Here: We Have a Future Together.” Click to [view the tip](#).

We invite colleagues to share their reflections on tips 3 and 4 of “I Belong Here” via [audio or video](#)! All participants who respond will get a chance to win two tickets to Mariah Carey Christmas at the Wells Fargo Center on Dec. 13 at 7:30 p.m. (two lucky winners will be chosen at random).

Here’s how to enter:

1. Watch the Practicing Excellence tips “We Have a Future Together” and “Collaborating Across Teams” and consider how the content pertains to your role and experiences at Virtua.
2. Record a response video (or audio message) about one of the tips and the corresponding reflection question.
3. Send your video or audio message to virtuainfo@virtua.org or [Grace Roche via Teams](#). Responses should be brief, upbeat, and specific. Limit one entry per colleague.

The reflection questions are:

- “We Have a Future Together”: What makes you feel proud of your team, its members, and their accomplishments? What actions or behaviors give you the feeling of belonging?
- “Collaborating Across Teams”: Recall a situation that required the skill and efforts of several different teams and specialties to resolve successfully. How did you acknowledge appreciation to your teammates for their efforts?

Entries are due by 11:59 p.m. on **Friday, Dec. 1**. Winners will be chosen on **Monday, Dec. 4**.

What Patients Are Saying About Our Clinicians

Through their reviews, patients are revealing their confidence in their clinicians. Note the following recent examples and how the patient felt about the experience, and the clinician referenced:

- “Always caring and detail oriented. So patient. Best doctor I’ve ever had.” (Adriana Davis, DO)
- “Very smart and completely thorough. Thank you so much, Dr. Ukrainski, for caring.” (Gerald Ukrainski, MD)
- “He has been my neurologist for nearly 19 years. I have never had an issue and I will remain truly grateful for everyone who works in that office. They are AWESOME!” (Timothy Dunn, MD)
- “What a wonderful human being... Our heartfelt THANK YOU to a wonderful doctor and his associates. God Bless you, Doctor, for caring so much and giving my husband the attention he deserves.” (Joshua Crasner, DO)
- “Found Dr. Au to be caring and soothing, great bedside manner. Made me confident in my choice of physicians.” (Alexander Au, MD)

Virtua in the News

Virtua Voorhees Cafeteria Becomes Media Sensation

Defying stereotypes about “hospital food,” the fare at Virtua Voorhees Hospital recently drew hundreds of rave reviews on Facebook—followed by glowing news stories. An initial post about the cafeteria’s delicious and affordable sushi in the South Jersey Food Scene group earned more than 1,100 likes in 24 hours. It prompted another 700-plus users to post enthusiastic reviews for an array of menu items. Read in the [Courier Post](#) or [Burlington County Times](#) and [FOX29 News](#).

Helpful Words from the Bot in your Pocket

Virtua announced a collaboration with Woebot Health that, over time, will allow Virtua primary care clinicians and specialists to provide Woebot for Adults for people waiting to see a behavioral health provider or seeking support outside of traditional in-person therapy sessions. Click to read more in [NJ Spotlight News](#).

Virtua Chief Clinical Officer Honored as a Veteran in Business

Reg Blaber, MD, EVP and chief clinical officer, was among several veterans recently honored for military service and contributions to the region's business community. Dr. Blaber achieved the rank of major in the U.S. Army. After six years of military service as a physician, he transitioned to a civilian career and completed a cardiology fellowship. Read in [Philadelphia Business Journal](#).

Virtua Expert Discusses Outlook for 76ers Player with Broken Rib

The Sixers' Kelly Oubre Jr. fractured a rib when he was hit by a car on Saturday. Virtua thoracic surgeon Matthew Puc, MD, explained how that type of injury is treated and when Oubre might return to playing basketball. Read in [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#).

Virtua Named Among 63 Health Systems With Strong Finances

A national industry publication has included Virtua on a list of health systems with solid financial positions, based on reports from three major credit-rating agencies. Virtua's high rating is supported by its "leading market position in a stable service area and the successful integration of the Lourdes Health System," according to Fitch Ratings. Read in [Becker's Hospital Review](#).

Virtua Recognized for Spine and Neuroscience Programs

A prominent industry publication has named Virtua to its 2023 list of "hospitals and health systems with spine and neuroscience programs to know." These programs are "renowned for their excellent outcomes, leading surgical techniques, and cutting-edge research," the article stated. Read in [Becker's Hospital Review](#).

Virtua Named Among 17 Top Ambulatory Care Programs

The College of Healthcare Information Management Executives has recognized the top ambulatory care organizations for 2023, with Virtua and 16 other systems earning CHIME's highest designation. Read in [Becker's ASC Review](#).

Give for Good: Supporting Clinicians and Everyone We Serve

Thanks to the philanthropic partnership of more than 800 Virtua Health colleagues, including hundreds of Virtua clinicians, we have achieved 60% of our Give for Good goal for 2023.

[Give for Good](#) is Virtua's annual colleague giving campaign, which brings us all the opportunity to support each other and our patients through philanthropy. Your participation in this impactful program is so important. As Virtua focuses on clinician wellness by establishing Refuel Rooms, rolling out peer support networks, and more, you can boost your own wellness through Give for Good and lead by example.

If you haven't participated yet, there's still time! All colleague gifts made through the end of the year will count toward Give for Good 2023. Gifts of any size are appreciated, and here at Virtua, 100% of each dollar you donate goes directly to your designation. (Learn about the many designation options [here](#).)

"Making a philanthropic investment through Give for Good is important to me as a physician and community member," said Randolph B. Deger, MD. "It's a way to do all I can to support the health and well-being of everyone we serve. I invite and encourage all of my clinical colleagues to participate along with me."

To learn more and make your gift, visit GiveToVirtua.org/Colleagues. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Philanthropy at 856-355-0830 or gratitude@virtua.org.

Pediatric Mobile Services to Grow Thanks to Generous Donation

The Joseph Lacroce Foundation has pledged \$1 million in support of Virtua Health's Pediatric Mobile Services program—the same initiative it helped to launch in 2018 with an equally generous donation. Through this recent gift, Virtua will launch a second mobile health van in late 2024 to further improve access to vital screenings and services for children. The demand for the program has grown considerably over the years, providing screenings and services to more than 4,000 children annually.

Virtua has ordered a second fully customized van to double its current capacity. When it takes the road, the second vehicle will primarily provide medical care (physicals, vaccinations) so that the original vehicle can be dedicated to early education and preventive health screenings.

Read more [here](#).

Colleague Corner to Feature New Clinical and Resources Tabs

On Monday, Nov. 20, the Colleague Corner will introduce two new tabs on the primary navigation menu (coral-colored bar): a "Clinical" tab designed for clinicians and a "Resources" tab.

Additionally, the Corporate Compliance Corner and Information Privacy and Security hyperlinks have been relocated to the footer of the Colleague Corner.

As content continues to find new, long-term placements on the Colleague Corner, the marketing and information technology teams will be working with our clinical leaders to develop new, relevant content as links are eventually decommissioned on the Virtua VINE. Thank you for your continued support and cooperation.

Annual Mandatory Conflict of Interest Disclosure Available on Virtua Works

Virtua colleagues, who are supervisor level and above, and all employed health care providers (physicians, nurse practitioners, anesthesiologist, and physician assistants) are required to complete the annual Conflict of Interest Disclosure Attestation by **Thursday, Nov. 30**.

Currently, 14% have completed the annual Conflict of Interest.

The Conflict of Interest Disclosure Attestation is available on the home page of Virtua Works under announcements. On Virtua Works, please click 'View More Announcements' to complete the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ryan Peoples, compliance manager (856-355-0729), or Raquel Ravelo, corporate compliance auditor (856-355-0739).