

# Healthy Living



**Weighed  
down  
no more**

Bariatric surgery  
puts mom back  
in the fun zone



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# Letter from the president

Dear friends,

At the height of summer, I had the pleasure of gathering with members of our new Garden Club to harvest herbs that now flavor the infused waters available in our Blue Heron Café. Our green-thumb associates had previously expressed a desire for a garden on campus as a means of stress relief, and it's been heartwarming to see this vision come to fruition.

This spring, we were fortunate to be selected as the site for a local Boy Scout's Eagle Project. Troop 420 from Leonardtown brought their enthusiasm and expertise to build beautiful, raised garden beds beside the Outpatient Pavilion. Over the season, our dedicated associates have taken turns tending these beds, growing an assortment of herbs including pineapple sage, cinnamon basil, chocolate mint, and French lavender. Not only do these herbs enhance the flavors of our café offerings, but they also provide uplifting aromatherapy benefits that contribute to our overall well-being.

At MedStar Health, we continually seek innovative ways to enhance the wellness of our community and team members. Our commitment to fostering a healthy environment is reflected in our diverse array of wellness programs and support systems for our staff. We are proud to share that our efforts have once again earned us recognition as one of Maryland's Healthiest Businesses, achieving the prestigious Exemplar Status.

We recognize that many of our staff both work and live within our community, and we understand that a healthy workforce directly contributes to a thriving community. As we look toward the future, we remain dedicated to nurturing both the physical and mental well-being of our team and our neighbors. Together, we are building a healthier, more vibrant community where everyone can flourish.

We hope you can stop by and enjoy the garden the next time you are here and thank you for your continued support and commitment to our shared mission.

Here's to many more seasons of growth, both in our garden and in our community!

Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP



# 1,000 robotic surgeries and counting

At MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, we pride ourselves on delivering top-notch care through cutting-edge technology. Since 2023, we have reached the incredible milestone of 1,000 robotic surgical procedures, ensuring our patients benefit from the advantages of minimally invasive surgery—smaller incisions, faster recovery times, and less postoperative pain.

"Our commitment to integrating advanced technology into patient care is unwavering," said **Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP, president and chief medical officer of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.** "Our robotic surgical program has become a cornerstone of our community healthcare services, and we are continually expanding both the range and complexity of the procedures we offer, using the most advanced techniques available."



**MedStar St. Mary's Hospital's robotic surgeons celebrate the 1,000th procedure performed with the da Vinci surgical system. Back row from left to right: Arthur Greenwood, MD, obstetrics/gynecology; Sameer Alrefai, MD, bariatrics/general surgery; and Gustavo Franco, MD, general surgery. Front row, left to right: Lindsey Threlkeld, MD, obstetrics/gynecology; Veronica Marshall, DO, general surgery; and Sharan Mullen, DO, obstetrics/gynecology.**



## Experience matters

Our robotic surgical program offers state-of-the-art, minimally invasive procedures in various specialties. Experience the future of surgery today.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Robotics](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Robotics) to learn more and find a local provider.

# No longer weighed down.

Bariatric surgery restores a young mother's energy and love for life.



**Shaneka Lee is thrilled to have lost 120 pounds following bariatric surgery performed by Sameer Alrefai, MD, pictured at right. Shaneka is so happy with her results she continues to recommend friends to Dr. Alrefai and Katelyn Edinger, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, nurse practitioner.**

A year ago, Shaneka Lee decided to change her life. Walking her son to the bus stop, the 33-year-old mother of two was out of breath and exhausted.

"It was so embarrassing and so disturbing," said Shaneka. "That was when I was at my highest weight-285 pounds."

Shaneka had previously looked into bariatric surgery, but she couldn't quite bring herself to go through with the procedure until after that trip to the bus stop.

"I have struggled with my weight since high school," said Shaneka. "I played sports, but I was always the bigger person at 160 to 170 pounds. I played basketball, I ran track and field, and I played softball."

Following graduation, Shaneka stopped playing sports and at 19, she had her first child and delivered a second child at 23. Working as a certified nursing assistant and raising two small children, she found it difficult to prioritize losing her pregnancy weight.

"I blew up completely after my second child," said Shaneka. "I was so overweight that I was tired standing up all day at work."

An appointment with Sameer Alrefai, MD, of the bariatric surgery program at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, changed Shaneka's mind about proceeding with weight-loss surgery.

"Dr. Alrefai made me feel comfortable with getting this surgery," said Shaneka. "He made me feel like a priority."

"Shaneka's weight was keeping her from enjoying her life to the fullest," said Dr. Alrefai. "I wanted to help her

find joy again—to be able to play with her children and live her life with renewed energy."

Following their initial evaluation, patients—depending on their insurance requirements—must complete several pre-surgery appointments, which may include counseling from a dietitian and a psychiatric evaluation. Shaneka took about six months to fulfill the requirements, and she was scheduled for surgery on Aug. 1, 2023.

"The surgery was amazing," said Shaneka, who had a robotic sleeve gastrectomy and hiatal hernia repair. Bariatric surgery performed with the da Vinci surgical system results in smaller incisions and fewer complications. She stayed in the hospital overnight.

"Shaneka recovered remarkably," said Dr. Alrefai. "She followed the post-operative instructions and worked hard at adapting to her new way of eating. Her results are proof of her commitment."

"Many people think, 'I get the surgery and go back to what I was doing,' but your life changes, and if you are not

prepared for that, you will not achieve your desired results," said Shaneka.

Preparing for the surgery, Shaneka discovered her unhealthy relationship with food, and adjusting to her new eating habits was not easy.

"Food is everywhere," said Shaneka. "You get a new job, there's food. Someone at the job has a baby, and there's food. You leave a job, there's food. I wasn't sad or depressed, it was just that food was always available on demand no matter where I went. I didn't think it was an addiction before; I just thought it made me feel good, so I would eat."

The sleeve gastrectomy reduces the patient's stomach to about 20% of its original size, leaving a much smaller stomach shaped like a banana. The smaller size requires patients to drastically reduce the amount of food they can consume.

"The post-surgery diet is key to achieving the maximum results from the procedure," said Dr. Alrefai. "Our team works with each patient to make sure they understand

what to eat, especially ensuring they are taking in enough protein and supplements to meet their nutritional needs."

Shaneka has a new lease on life a year after her surgery, and she couldn't be happier.

"At first, my family was a little skeptical. They said, 'You don't need to get the surgery,' but now they see how it's making me happier and more energetic. I can play football and soccer with my kids, so my family is very grateful," said Shaneka, who had lost about 120 pounds to date.

Shaneka is so thankful for her new life that she repeatedly recommends Dr. Alrefai and his team to others, along with giving them some personal advice.

"I was one of those people who thought this was the easy way out, but it's not," said Shaneka. "When I recommend this to people, I tell them you have to prepare your mind before doing this. It helps you; it's a tool, and whatever your doctor tells you to do, do it. Follow the course, trust the course."



## Choosing the right program

Many insurance companies require patients to undergo bariatric surgery through accredited surgical programs. MedStar Health's Bariatric Surgery Program is accredited by the **Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program® (MBSAQIP®)**, a joint Quality Program of the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS). The program ensures centers meet the highest patient safety and quality of care standards.

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital is the only accredited program in the Southern Maryland region.



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

Outpatient Pavilion, second floor  
25500 Point Lookout Road,  
Leonardtown, MD  
P 240-434-4088  
[MedStarHealth.org/WeightLoss](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/WeightLoss)

# Care through connection.

## Emergency Room improvements fueled by patient feedback, innovation

With yearly Emergency Room (ER) visits totaling more than a quarter of the population of St. Mary's County, the ER is often the first contact patients have with MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. With an average of 120 patients moving through the department daily, the team is redesigning workflows and evaluating treatment areas to streamline patient interactions and boost patient satisfaction.

"At MedStar St. Mary's, we strive to tackle the challenges associated with emergency care head-on to provide high-quality care to our community," said Saad Zaatari, MD, MBA, chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

"The volume of patients has grown astronomically—14% in the last year," said Jennifer Alvey, MS, BSN, RN, NE-BC,

nursing director of the ER. "We want to be the provider of choice in our community, which means we need to be creative and innovative in our approaches to advancing care."

### Room refreshes

Each week, the hospital's facilities team refreshes one room in the ER. Walls are patched and painted, old wallpaper removed, and medical equipment organized and minimized for a tidier, neater appearance.

"Patients waiting for transfer can be in rooms for long periods of time," said Jennifer. "We are working hard to make sure the environment reflects the level of care we provide."

### Reducing wait times

"Our renovations to the ER have focused not only on aesthetics but also on improving functionality and efficiency," said Dr. Zaatari.

For example, the team has optimized its Rapid Evaluation and Treatment Area (RETA) to minimize wait times for those seeking care for less serious medical issues. Patients who do not require a bed are brought to RETA where tests can be performed or ordered. They then return to a waiting area until they are brought back to RETA for a consultation and to discuss the next steps in their care plan, which could mean being discharged home or admitted to the hospital.

"We are constantly seeking more efficient and innovative ways to utilize our space to provide the highest quality and most empathetic care to our community," said Dr. Zaatari.

### Becoming the employer of choice

"We have brought together an incredible team of nurses and medical providers to staff our ER," said Jennifer. "During the past year, we have retained a strong group of nurses dedicated to emergency care."

A emergency nursing residency program begun this year provides additional training and education specific to the ER for nurses new to the department.

"As one of the nation's leading health systems, MedStar Health provides standardized, high-quality medical care that is patient-centric," said Dr. Zaatari.

Many of MedStar St. Mary's ER providers bring cutting-edge medical care to the community through their academic affiliations with Georgetown University.

"Our proactive attitude attracts top talent, and we are fortunate to have an excellent pool of physicians and physician assistants who have trained at the country's best institutions," said Dr. Zaatari.



Members of the Emergency Room team with Saad Zaatari, MD, MBA, chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine, back row, left; Jennifer Alvey, MS, BSN, RN, NE-BC, nursing director, front row, fourth from left; and Floyd Howell IV, MD, MBA, vice chair, Emergency Medicine, Stroke Director, back row, right.

### Improving Behavioral Health care

In 2023, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital was awarded a federal grant to improve Behavioral Health spaces, including remodeling two rooms in the ER. Designated for patients experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis, these rooms will be reconfigured to create a more welcoming area for three to four patients, which may include an activities/entertainment area, triage/interview space, seclusion room, and bathroom with shower.

### Expanding imaging capabilities

A renovation of the Imaging area in the ER is in the planning stages. The 400-square-foot space will focus on the patients' needs and those of the radiologic technologists operating

the room. The room size will allow for improved stretcher and wheelchair access and give staff the optimal space to work with patients. Equipment will have a 700-lb. weight capacity to serve bariatric patients and will feature integrated patient assist and lifting devices for improved safety.

### Advancing safety

"We are working to ensure the highest level of safety measures are in practice in the ER," said Jennifer. "We are committed to ensuring the safety of everyone who enters this building— patients and staff."

Security staff in the area has been increased, with guards posted at the entrances. Additional screening processes have been implemented, as has a new visitor check-in process.

### Connecting with patients

Leadership routinely reviews patient satisfaction surveys and rounds with patients to gather real-time feedback on their experiences.

"We want to know what our community wants when they come into the ER," said Jennifer. "Community feedback is essential in helping us narrow our focus to projects that matter to our patients."

## 2024 Gala supports our ER

Help support renovations of our Emergency Room by participating in the MedStar St. Mary's Hospital's 37th annual Gala **Friday, Nov. 22**, from 7 p.m. to midnight at the Hollywood Social Hall. Enjoy an evening of high fashion, elegance, and romance at our annual black-tie event with a Parisian twist which supports our non-profit hospital.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Paris](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Paris) for more information.

Visit [MedStar Health.org/ Emergency](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Emergency) to learn more about Emergency Room care and our providers.

# Patient is grateful for attentive, life-saving care.

Paula Large, BSN, RN, recognizes her unique ability to connect with people, especially those she encounters as an Emergency Room (ER) nurse, volunteer firefighter, and emergency medical technician (EMT). This is why when she responded with an EMS team to Jennifer Crow's home in April, she knew immediately that Jennifer was in desperate need of medical attention.

"I am a good people reader," said Paula, who has worked in the MedStar St. Mary's Hospital ER since 2006.

Jennifer was recovering from a recent spinal surgery when she began to feel unwell.

"I called a friend to take me to the hospital, but I was unable to stand and was in and out of consciousness," she said. Jennifer had been experiencing diarrhea, vomiting, and a rising temperature. Her son called 9-1-1.

Upon entering Jennifer's home, the EMS team immediately began assessing her situation. They quickly triaged Jennifer and loaded her into the ambulance for transport.

"I did not know how sick I was," said Jennifer, "but Paula immediately recognized my symptoms. She saw my color change and knew that it was urgent."

Jennifer was going into septic shock which is a severe complication of sepsis, a life-threatening reaction to an infection.

"Jennifer met all of the criteria for septic shock: she had a high heart rate, high respiration, she was cold, and diaphoretic (sweating excessively)," said Paula. Well-trained in recognizing sepsis, Paula quickly contacted the ER to let them know Jennifer was on her way.

"Paula just saw what was wrong with me and immediately took charge," said Jennifer. "My ER bay was packed with people, and I remember looking up, and they had six bags of fluid going. I knew it was different, but I did not



Jennifer Crow, right, visits with Emergency Room nurse Paula Large, BSN, RN.

understand how serious it was. I do not think they left me alone in the bay the entire time I was in the ER."

Jennifer was stabilized and transferred to the facility that performed her surgery where she received further treatment and antibiotics for her sepsis infection. She was moved into nursing care, but unfortunately found herself back in the ER only a short time later.

As Paula walked by Jennifer's room, she recognized her former patient.

"I am a people person," said Paula, "I remember faces and I try to talk to patients as I take care of them and treat them like they are family."

Paula was again able to help Jennifer, connecting her to additional resources to assist with her recovery.

Jennifer is grateful for the care she received from Paula and her entire medical team.

"I am moving around better and feel well enough to sit at dinner with my kids or sit outside on my lawn furniture again," Jennifer said. "I am on the road to recovery, a little better every day."

"Patients come in sick, they are scared, and I let them know they are not alone," said Paula. "I think that is what makes the ER different; our patients are vulnerable, and they just want to know that you've got them."

# Where clinical precision and compassion change lives.

The MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute (MGCI) combines the unparalleled expertise of MedStar Health and Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, which serves as our research engine. This powerful partnership allows us to offer cutting-edge treatments today through advanced clinical trials.

Our collective resources allow us to provide targeted treatment plans tailored to each patient's individual needs. By combining the expertise of leading physicians, the latest therapies, and the innovation from cutting-edge research, **we offer patients the best possible cancer care—and more importantly, hope.**



## Why choose us?

• **MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute at St. Mary's** is one of eight MGCI locations in the region allowing patients to access world-class cancer care close to home. We offer both in-person and virtual appointments for your convenience.

• **Patient-centered approach:** We focus on your unique needs, preferences, and goals from diagnosis through survivorship. Your journey is at the heart of all we do.

• **Expert cancer specialists:** Our team includes specialists with extensive experience in diagnosing and treating various types of cancer. Their expertise ensures the best possible outcomes.

• **Collaborative team approach:** Our multidisciplinary team of experts creates comprehensive, personalized treatment plans. This collaborative method ensures you receive well-rounded care.

• **Research and innovation:** Partnering with Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center—the only NCI-designated comprehensive cancer center in Washington, D.C.—we provide access to groundbreaking clinical trials and the latest cancer treatments.

• **Advanced treatment options:** Our wide range of treatments includes robotic surgery, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy, and radiation therapy. Each plan is tailored to your specific needs.

• **Experience and reputation:** Referring physicians trust our proven track record in successfully treating various cancers.



## Recent patient feedback

"The whole staff is like a family to me. Dr. Cross is most wonderful and takes his time to explain everything I ask of him."

"The staff and doctors are amazing and always make me feel welcome, and take care of all my needs."

"The nurses and staff are so caring and proficient in their duties, I wish I could schedule all my medical needs there."



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Cancer](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Cancer) to learn more about MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute and how we can support your cancer care journey.



September is Sepsis Awareness month. Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Sepsis](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Sepsis) to learn how to recognize the signs of this deadly infection.



## MedStar St. Mary's Hospital makes the 'A'

This spring MedStar St. Mary's Hospital earned an "A" Hospital Safety Grade from the LeapFrog Group, a national nonprofit watchdog that sets standards for excellence in patient care. Hospitals receive a grade based on more than 30 national performance measures reflecting errors, accidents, injuries, infections, and the systems hospitals have in place to prevent harm. Thank you for all of your efforts to help us provide the safest care for our patients and community!

## Francis Dyson celebrated as 2024 Associate of the Year

**Francis Dyson**, Environmental Services team member, was honored as the 2024 Associate of the Year in May. Known for his dedication and commitment to patient needs, Francis is a "go-to" member of the night shift team praised for anticipating others' needs. As a past winner of the SPIRIT Award, the monthly recognition program for associates at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, Francis was honored for his commitment to patients, colleagues, and our community.



## Healthy pantry supports patients beyond hospital

The Equity, Inclusion & Diversity Council of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital hosted a healthy food drive this summer to help restock the shelves of its food pantry, available internally to patients facing food insecurity at home. Associates donated ready-to-eat proteins, fruits, and more for individuals in need.

Pictured: EI&D Council members **Shaunna Nance**, left, and **Mary B. Cheseldine** with some of the June donations.



## Local students earn 2024 hospital scholarships

Two local students were awarded scholarships in MedStar St. Mary's Hospital's annual scholarship program, supporting them as they pursue careers in health care and return to care for our community: **Taylor Parrish** of Avenue (radiography), and **DeReonna Bush** of California (nursing).

To learn more about the program, visit [MedStarHealth.org/MSMHScholarship](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/MSMHScholarship).



Taylor Parrish



DeReonna Bush

## Ask the Experts: Quarterly Lunch and Learn



Thursday, Nov. 14, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., Health Connections classrooms  
Outpatient Pavilion  
MedStar St. Mary's Hospital  
No cost. Call 301-475-6019 to register.

### 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 301-475-6185.

### Simple Changes (Pre-diabetes)

Begins Sept. 26, 5:30 p.m. Participate in our free, year-long class designed to eliminate possible diabetes risk factors by making simple, healthier changes in your life. Program includes free body composition screenings, handouts, giveaways, and support between sessions. This one-year program is a combination of weekly and monthly sessions. Call 301-475-6019 to register.

### Childbirth & family education

#### Parents-to-Be Workshop

In-person classes: Sept. 14 and Nov. 2, 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

Nov. 16, 11:30 a.m. to 2 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.

To register for support groups or classes, call **301-475-6019** or email [msmh-populationhealth@medstar.net](mailto:msmh-populationhealth@medstar.net).

### 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

Sept. 27 and Oct. 24, 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

Conversation Maps is a four-week, in-person class 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. Fall classes are Sept. 9 through 30, and Nov. 4 through 24. Call 301-475-6019 to register or learn more.

25500 Point Lookout Rd.  
Leonardtown, MD 20650

**MedStar St. Mary's Hospital**



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to be removed from future mailings.

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# Nationally recognized for nursing excellence.

Summer was a season of celebration at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital as the American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC) bestowed Magnet Recognition on the hospital for the first time. MedStar St. Mary's Hospital is the fifth MedStar Health hospital to be Magnet® Recognized.

Magnet Recognition is one of the highest and most prestigious distinctions a healthcare organization can achieve in the United States with fewer than 10% of hospitals nationally holding the designation.

"I am so proud of the incredible work of our team," said **Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP, president and chief medical officer of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.** "Guided by the principles of the Magnet program, we have built a culture of exceptional quality and care."

MedStar St. Mary's is the first hospital in the Southern Maryland region to obtain Magnet recognition.

MedStar St. Mary's was recognized by the ANCC with eight exemplars—one for Structural Empowerment and seven for Exemplary Professional Practice. Exemplars underscore exceptional performance in the various elements of the Magnet model.

"This Magnet designation is not just a recognition of past achievements," said **Dawn Yeittrakis, MS, BSN, RN, NEA-BC, vice president and chief nursing officer,** "it is a commitment from our team to continue to excel and innovate our nursing care. We are steadfastly dedicated to continuing to improve patient care as well as the overall healthcare experience for all those we serve."

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/MSMHNursing](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/MSMHNursing) to learn more about our nursing program.



**Pictured from left to right are Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP, president and chief medical officer; Dawn Yeittrakis, MS, BSN, RN, NEA-BC, vice president and chief nursing officer; Amanda Dyson, MSN, RN, PCCN, director nursing practice innovation and Magnet program director; and Janet Smith, MHPE, BSN, RN, NPJ-BC, CNML, senior director of nursing excellence and resource management.**