

Spring 2014

# Health Matters

at Aspen Valley Hospital

Photo by Ducky Coombe, RN



Brooke Allen, MD

## Raising awareness of head injuries is a HIT

A skier loses consciousness after crashing on the slopes and hitting her head. An inline skater seems okay after a fall but later experiences a severe headache and dizziness. A mountain biker blacks out after falling hard on a rocky course.

The treatment these types of patients receive can vary based on the hospital where they receive care — or even the doctor assigned to the case. At Aspen Valley Hospital (AVH), however, a new Head Injury Team (HIT) is actively standardizing protocols, improving care, and increasing the odds that patients with traumatic brain injuries will experience a more complete recovery.

“There are so many conflicting ideas about how best to treat concussions and other traumatic head injuries, from hospital to hospital and even from doctor to doctor,” says Brooke Allen, MD, board-certified neurologist on AVH’s medical staff and a founding member of HIT. “As care professionals in the Aspen area, participants in HIT want to speak with one voice based on evidence-based guidelines in respect to patient care and cost-effectiveness.”

HIT’s mission is to provide education and support to the community and caregivers about prevention and management of traumatic brain injuries. The group’s membership represents a broad spectrum of medical interests including rehabilitation

therapy, neurology, orthopaedic surgery, trauma surgery, emergency medicine, family medicine, pediatrics, emergency medical services, athletic trainers, and mental health professionals.

Since it began meeting in early 2013 and officially launched in December, HIT has already made progress toward some of its most significant goals, including:

- Completing a review of treatment protocols for patients coming out of the emergency room with traumatic brain injury.
- Creating a network of local mental health providers interested in treating patients coping with issues such as depression and anxiety following a head injury.
- Standardizing guidelines for helping patients return to work, school, and life.
- Organizing a conference this fall for teachers, parents, and athletic staff to learn about traumatic brain injury.

Another current initiative is measuring the use of CT scans following concussion. According to Dr. Allen, scans are usually unnecessary unless the patient experiences symptoms that would raise a “red flag.”

“We’re excited to raise awareness about diagnosing and treating traumatic brain injuries,” Dr. Allen says. “Patients, physicians, and the community all stand to benefit.”

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*“Aspen Valley Hospital has to be the best hospital in the world! My care was excellent, and I was treated as a very special guest and most welcome friend.”*

– AVH patient

# Heads up!

## Be aware of the real danger of concussions

Not many years ago, people who suffered a concussion were often told to “shake it off and get back in the game.” Today, concussions are treated much differently: as serious brain injuries.

The topic has been hotly debated because of evidence that repeated or untreated concussions have caused brain damage in professional football players. However, everyday athletes, particularly children engaged in contact sports, are also at risk, according to Brooke Allen, MD, neurologist at Aspen Valley Hospital.

### Recognizing concussions

“If you are hurt and experience immediate symptoms, such as severe headache, nausea, vomiting, weakness, numbness, or difficulty with speech or thinking, seek medical care immediately,” says Dr. Allen. “If you hit your head but have no immediate symptoms, tell someone so they can monitor you in case symptoms arise later.”

While most individuals with concussion recover within 7 to 10 days, individuals should seek medical care for symptoms of post-concussive syndrome, which can occur days or even weeks after trauma.

Post-concussive symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Changes in vision or balance
- Anxiety or depression
- Changes in memory or personality

### Treating head injury

Physical and cognitive rest is crucial for one to two weeks following a concussion. That means very limited physical and mental activity. “A concussion impacts the pathways in the brain, and those pathways need time to heal,” Dr. Allen says. “If you continue to put in a typical workday, your brain has no energy to recover and symptoms may return.”



## Lynx makes it easy for you — and your doctors — to access your medical records

A system called the Lynx Collaborative Care Network — offered locally as AspenCares — is now being offered in the Aspen area. Developed in part by Dennis Cirillo, MD, plastic surgeon at Aspen Valley Hospital, it gives patients secure control of their medical information and provides doctors more tools to provide care.

Many physicians and facilities have internal systems for electronic health records, but these systems often don't connect with other systems or with patients. Lynx takes a two-part approach to addressing these shortcomings.

First, Lynx distills personal health information collected from all caregivers. A nurse and a physician create a summary of the patient's medical history in a format that puts the most relevant information up front where a caregiver can

access it easily. A simple click on items in the summary, and the treating physician is connected to the actual data.

Second, Lynx provides the information to the patient in a format that can be shared with a doctor. There is also a password-protected web site where the patient can direct a doctor to access the medical records.

Lynx is especially helpful for people who travel frequently — such as many Aspen area residents.

“We should be paying attention to the fact that many Pitkin County residents have second homes and travel extensively,” Dr. Cirillo says. “If healthcare is needed or was received elsewhere, having ready access to medical information saves money and time and improves safety.”

To learn more about AspenCares, call **303.670.5969, ext. 3**.

# Construction update — the end of Phase II

## Registration Renovation

As off-season approaches, our project team is preparing for a renovation of the admissions/registration department. While significant changes to this area will occur in a few years (during the final phase of the hospital's master facilities plan), anyone who has been a patient at Aspen Valley Hospital knows that at this time the "front desk" does not afford privacy to patients as they register and discuss insurance and billing. Renovations now will "tide us over" for the next few years.

In April, the "new" east entrance will be used for all except emergency patients. The "old" main entrance will be closed for the renovation. From the east entrance lobby, patients will be directed to a new, temporary registration office near the cafeteria.

Emergency patients will continue to use the existing emergency entrance, but vehicular traffic will have a slightly altered path. Parking will be reserved for emergency patients near that entrance. Watch for more information in local newspapers regarding specifics when we are ready to implement these changes.

## Intensive Care Unit

Our new four-bed intensive care unit (ICU) is now open! The old ICU was one of the most compressed clinical areas in the hospital with significant privacy issues; little space for staff, supplies, and equipment; and only one toilet shared by patients and staff. The shower was actually located outside the unit and across the hall.

With the opening of the new unit, all of the above problems are corrected. Each room offers privacy, but there is also critical observational capability. Bathrooms are in each room and meet Americans with Disabilities

Act requirements. All have isolation and lift capabilities, thus minimizing the spread of infection and the risk of staff injuries when lifting patients.

Family members often spend many hours, even days, with their hospitalized loved one, so the rooms are designed to comfortably accommodate visitors. Located adjacent to the cardiopulmonary diagnostics department, respiratory therapists — who are often involved in the care of critically ill patients — are just steps away from the ICU.

"The new ICU is truly state of the art and supports our staff in providing the highest quality of care. Multi-positional equipment in the headwalls allows for maximum flexibility and efficient care from locations on either side of the bed," says April Boney, inpatient nurse manager. "We are very excited to have an environment that helps our staff provide the best possible care."

## Preparing for the final phase

This spring we will begin to prepare for the final phase of the master facilities plan. Site work, including earthmoving activities and utility installation, will begin on the west side of the building.

While there will be no impact on the public, the ambulance quarters located in that area will be moved off-site (to the North 40 Firehouse). Our community liaison, Frank Goldsmith, will continue to meet with neighbors and other interested community members to ensure that any concerns are addressed in a timely fashion.

Once philanthropic funding thresholds are achieved and site work is completed, construction on the final phase will begin. It expands and renovates the emergency department, surgery, lab, and diagnostic imaging.



*The new ICU features four private rooms, each with their own toilet facilities. Project manager John Schied and chief clinical officer Elaine Gerson check out the state-of-the-art technology for the delivery of care.*



## Foundation update

*By Deborah Breen, Aspen Valley Hospital Foundation President*

Thanks to the outpouring of interest and support from community members like you, I have a lot of great news to report. In the past few months, we were able to formalize our role as the dedicated fundraising arm

for Aspen Valley Hospital (AVH), recruit skilled leadership to the foundation board, continue conversations with our philanthropic community, launch our first annual appeal, develop a premier annual giving club — the Summit Society, and embrace the Internet and social media as additional ways to connect with our donors and friends.

We also obtained our official 501(c)(3) IRS designation as a nonprofit organization, and pushed the capital campaign tracker to the \$19.1 million mark. Still, much work needs to be done as we look to raise an unprecedented \$60 million to support the hospital's building and modernization project. Getting out and telling our story and showcasing the role philanthropy plays in bringing this project to fruition is a key theme moving forward. In short, the pace of the project is now directly tied to the pace of our fundraising efforts.

While the main focus of our efforts is necessarily on the capital campaign, we are also implementing a diverse and comprehensive development program to support the current and future needs of AVH. In addition to raising capital support, we are expanding our base of annual donors, developing a grateful patient giving program, seeking opportunities for programmatic support and ongoing routine capital, and building a planned giving program.

*In short, the pace of the project is now directly tied to the pace of our fundraising efforts.*

In fact, we now have a planned giving expert available to meet with interested community members to explore if planned giving vehicles are the right fit for you and your family. The advisor is knowledgeable about how philanthropy can be integrated into overall financial planning strategies in a way that those considering supporting charitable causes might not have thought possible. Please contact me at **544.1302** to learn more about this new opportunity or any of our initiatives.

We continue to be grateful for the gifts we have already received and the receptiveness of our community to embrace our new foundation, recognizing the great benefits it brings to our community hospital and our community at large. We hope that you will continue to be interested in our progress, and we look forward to keeping you apprised of all the great things happening!

## Calendar of Events

### **Community Blood Drive**

Tuesday, June 3

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Aspen Valley Hospital

### **Health Fairs**

Thursday, June 5

8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Blood tests only at After-Hours  
Medical Care in Basalt

Saturday, June 7

8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Blood tests only at  
Aspen Valley Hospital

Sunday, June 8

8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Blood tests plus other screenings  
at Aspen Valley Hospital

Call **544.1296** for more information.

# 'Oh, my aching back!'

## Is back pain inevitable?

Aspen Valley Hospital's most recent Community Needs Assessment determined that, overall, Pitkin County residents are healthier than most Americans. Yet one result of the report was troubling: Nearly 24 percent of local residents live with chronic back pain, compared to a national average of 21.5 percent.

Although the statistic might seem like an anomaly, it could be related to the fact that very active lifestyles can overuse, stress, or injure the spine and back muscles. How can you remain active, manage your risk for back pain, and respond appropriately to symptoms?

### Defining back pain

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases defines acute back pain as pain that "comes on suddenly" and lasts no more than a few weeks. In most cases, acute back pain can be treated with rest and nonprescription pain medicine.

Chronic back pain, defined as lasting more than three months, is of greater concern because it can lead to long-term disability and suffering. Common causes of chronic back pain include bulging or ruptured disks, arthritis, and osteoporosis.

### Practice prevention

You can take steps every day to prevent back pain. Maintain good posture when sitting or standing. Use proper lifting technique that puts the weight on your leg muscles rather than your back. Bend at the knees or hips to tie your shoes or pick up objects from the floor.

Exercises that strengthen and stretch the back muscles also can help. Check with your physician, a physical therapist, or a qualified personal trainer about exercises to perform two or three times per week.

Often, nonsurgical treatments such as medication, rest, and exercise can help relieve back pain so you can safely return to your active life.



*William S. Timothy, MD, and medical assistant Jamie DeMoraes of Orthopaedic Associates*

### Seek medical help for back pain that:

- **Is severe.**
- **Is associated with leg pain, numbness, weakness, or changes in bowel or bladder control.**
- **Is the result of an injury.**
- **Does not get better after three days.**



## Accolades to MidValley Family Practice and Dr. Kotz

Congratulations to the MidValley Family Practice (MVFP) and Glenn Kotz, MD, on being one of three medical practices invited to present at a weeklong conference in Washington, D.C., in February. The conference was co-sponsored by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid.

A recognized Level III Patient Centered Medical Home, MVFP is focused on the use of health information technology, comprehensive whole patient care, and improved outcomes for patients.

# When you have a back problem . . .

Addressed early, non-urgent problems of the back can often be treated conservatively, and many patients don't need imaging or other diagnostic testing. In fact, self-care and non-pharmacologic therapy is frequently the chosen course of action.

Evaluation is nevertheless important, and the following resources are available in our community:

## Primary care providers

Your individual or family physician is the place to start. There are many family medicine, internal medicine, and physician assistants (PA-Cs) in the community who can perform the initial assessment and develop a course of treatment for you. For a physician referral, call **544.1296**.

## Physical therapy

Aspen Valley Hospital offers physical therapy at four different locations: AVH campus, downtown Aspen, Snowmass Club, and Snowmass Village. Call **544.1177** to learn more about services or to make an appointment.

## Physicians

Stanley Gertzbein, MD, board-certified in orthopaedic surgery, specializes in conservative spine care and is recognized by The International Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons as a Leading Physician of the World for his work in orthopaedic spine care (2012). Call Orthopaedic Associates at **925.4141**.

William S. Timothy, MD, board-certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation, specializes in spine and orthopaedic sports medicine and electrodiagnostic medicine. Call Orthopaedic Associates at **925.4141**.

Giora Hahn, MD, is a pain management specialist at the Pain Center of the Roaring Fork Valley. Call **544.1395**.

# AVH sets the Gold standard for employee wellness

Everyone knows that Aspen is one of the fittest communities in the country — and now it has one of the most fitness-focused hospitals, too. The American Heart Association recently honored Aspen Valley Hospital (AVH) as a Gold Fit-Friendly Worksite.

This prestigious designation is reserved for workplaces that “go above and beyond” to make employee fitness a top priority. As a Gold recipient, AVH was recognized not only for acknowledging the importance of a healthy work environment, but also for creating a culture of wellness by supporting employees as they strive to achieve their best health.

Gold Fit-Friendly Worksite designation means that AVH:

- Encourages employees to improve their health and wellness.
- Offers all employees physical activity support in the workplace.
- Has increased the number of healthy dining options available for employees.
- Embraces American Heart Association criteria for physical activity, nutrition, and culture.

In addition, AVH offers employees individualized coaching on a wide range of topics to instill positive health habits and help ensure maximum health.

When it comes to promoting wellness in our community, AVH is proud to lead by example!

*Employees have access to AVH's cardiac rehab facility when patient classes aren't in session.*





*This publication in no way seeks to diagnose or treat illness or serve as a substitute for professional medical care. Please see your physician if you have a health problem.*

## Surgical group selected for full-time practice in Aspen

After a lengthy due diligence process, Surgical Specialists of Colorado, PC (SSOC) was selected by Aspen Valley Hospital (AVH) officials to expand upon existing general surgery services in the community.

In July, two physicians from SSOC will join the AVH medical staff, holding office hours and providing elective, emergent, and follow-up care. Their offices will be located in the hospital, within the most recent addition to the building.

Currently, Bill Rodman, MD, is the community's only full-time general surgeon. For the past several months, his services have been supplemented by locum tenens surgeons (board-certified surgeons who handle emergencies when Dr. Rodman is off). Locum tenens coverage will continue until SSOC comes on board full-time in July.

SSOC is a Denver-based surgical practice comprised of 20-plus board-certified surgeons. They are affiliated with St. Anthony Hospital in Lakewood, Exempla Lutheran Medical Center in Wheat Ridge, Clear Creek Surgery Center in Wheat Ridge, Red Rocks Surgery Center in Golden, Middle Park Medical Center in Granby, and Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center in Salida.

Between now and July 1, AVH will be working with SSOC to identify the two surgeons who will relocate to Aspen. "It's important to find doctors who are a good fit for the community and the hospital," says AVH Chief Executive Officer Dan Bonk.

"By partnering with a larger medical group like SSOC, AVH will be able to provide choices for elective care and will benefit from their experience in high-acuity settings, as well as a breadth of services that most small towns can't provide," adds Dan. "SSOC is a top-notch organization that will be a nice addition to our medical staff."

SSOC partner and strategic officer Bruce Waring, MD, explained that SSOC offers a broad range of surgical services and has a presence in a number of mountain communities. Their commitment to these communities, including Aspen, is to meet the needs for 24/7 surgical coverage for trauma, acute care, and general surgery.

"We're looking forward to being in Aspen and working with the hospital and medical staff on a full-time basis," says Dr. Waring. "We bring a comprehensive skill set and will provide high quality, cost effective, compassionate care to the community."