

March 19, 2015



## **COUNTY HOSPITAL BECOMING A LEADER IN HEALTH CARE**

Many people think of public hospitals as hospitals of last resort. While it is true that Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (VMC) acts as a safety net for the most vulnerable residents in our community, it is much more than that. VMC is the only Level 1 Trauma Center in San Jose. Patients from all over the region seek out VMC because of the access they get to on-site specialists from its Burn, Spinal Cord, and Brain Injury Rehabilitation Centers. The Trauma Center also has specialists in Neurosurgery, Orthopedic Surgery and Pediatrics.

While VMC is renowned for these highly-skilled services, national healthcare reform has presented exciting opportunities to improve the everyday function of the hospital. Over the last few years, VMC has been working hard to improve health outcomes, improve client satisfaction, and lower the total cost of care—the so called “Triple-Aim” of healthcare reform. VMC has made great strides and is positioned to be the provider of first choice in our County.

In my role as Chair of the Health and Hospital Committee, I have focused on the successful implementation of the Affordable Care Act in this County. Besides increasing the number of residents with insurance coverage, healthcare reform also brought a number of opportunities to transform VMC for the better. I am proud of the work we have done to increase primary care capacity, reduce mortality and infections, improve scheduling and wait times, and create efficiencies that have saved money.

### ***Improving Health Outcomes***

One of the main goals of Affordable Care Act was to get healthcare coverage for more people. As a result, more employers are offering coverage and individuals have ready access to health plans. Furthermore, California has expanded the eligibility requirements for the Medi-Cal program, providing free or low-cost coverage to hundreds of thousands of residents. Many newly covered residents in Santa Clara County are choosing VMC for their care.

In response, VMC has been working diligently to increase access and capacity. New doctors and support staff have been hired, improving access to primary and specialty care services at VMC clinics. The VMC primary care network, which includes community-based partners and clinics, have added capacity to serve an additional 17,000 plus individuals, which will provide patients with a regular doctor that can also coordinate their care and deliver better services.

I have been very excited to see the progress VMC has made by utilizing innovative partnerships between managers and front line staff to find ways to improve their individual departments. For instance, emergency room staff and ambulance crews have come together to improve care in stroke emergencies. A new protocol was put into place to move patients directly from the ambulance to a CT scanner. The protocol has reduced delays in diagnosis and treatment for the patient while increasing the efficient use of our precious emergency room beds.

Emergency room reforms have seen the average wait time to first see a physician drop from 30 minutes to as low as 19 minutes. The median time from arrival to departure has dropped 21% in the past year. Operating Room reforms have helped lead to a significant improvement in on-time surgery starts and a 50% drop in same day surgery cancellations, leading to increased capacity of 11%. The Board of Supervisors also recently approved further expansion of operating room hours as part of its midyear budget.

VMC is now one of the largest and safest birth hospitals in California, due largely to its low C-section rates. More than 3,500 babies are born at VMC each year one of the highest birthing hospitals in Northern California. Nearly 450 of those births are high-risk births cared for in VMC's highly-skilled neonatal care unit. Currently, I am chairing an effort to create a Women and Children's Center that will bring more of those services under one roof in a calming and welcoming environment.

Knowing that for some patients physical health is linked to mental health and substance use disorders, VMC has worked to improve services in those areas. A big recent improvement was the consolidation of the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services into a combined Behavioral Health Department. This combination will bring greater efficiencies that allow for a tighter focus on patient-centered care. With parity under national health reform, we will need greater capacity to integrate care in primary care settings. Currently, more than 5,000 patients

A key Affordable Care Act performance measure is 30-day hospital readmissions for the Medicare population. Medicare now penalizes hospitals if they have too many patients return to the hospital within 30 days. VMC's readmission rate is the second lowest in the County. VMC is also doing better than statewide and national readmission rates, dropping from 19.3% to as low as 17.1% over the past year.

VMC is also one of the leaders in reducing mortality rates. Of the six most common health conditions the California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development measures for mortality rates, VMC has the lowest rate in Santa Clara County for two of those conditions and it has the second lowest rate for two other common conditions. For instance, a hospital-wide program brought down mortality rates due to sepsis by 50% over the last four years. Here, again, I am so proud of the employee work groups that have come together to find these solutions.

### ***Improving Client Satisfaction***

One of VMC's biggest pushes lately has been improving the patient experience from scheduling through care. Reform of doctors' schedules was one of the first steps. More efficient scheduling has increased the number of patients each doctor can now see in a day. Open slots are built into their schedules to take new patients or same day appointments. These reforms have increased productivity and patient access.

Communications with primary care patients has also been greatly improved. Phone systems have been redesigned. Assigned patients have seen a decrease in dropped calls and average wait times are just above a minute and half for most clinics. Last October, VMC launched a new online patient portal called "My Health Online" that allows patients to email their doctors, schedule appointments, view test results, and more.

Since doctor visits are not always necessary to care for a patient's needs, VMC has been encouraging clients to take advantage of more non-traditional visits such as phone advice and nurse visits. Tracking of non-traditional visits shows that these types of encounters have increased over the past few years. Patients have expressed satisfaction with the increased access to health resources these visits bring and the timeliness of care.

Pharmacy wait times are down as well. Recently, another work group of managers and front line staff came to the Health and Hospital Committee to talk about how they crafted solutions to long wait times at our system's busiest pharmacies. Now, wait times are under 30 minutes for 80% of visits. Staff actually exceeded the original target of 56% of visits. Improved staff scheduling based on real-time experience was part of the solution. They also created new phone protocols that better route patients' calls while minimizing staff time away from filling prescriptions.

VMC is now also tracking patient satisfaction through regular patient surveys. That data is reported on a semi-annual basis to the Health and Hospital Committee and becomes part of the public record. Over the last few years, VMC has seen improved satisfaction in terms of overall ratings, doctor communication, and whether the patient would recommend the hospital. Furthermore, the County recently created a Patient-Family Advisory Program to identify ways to improve patient experience from the perspective of our patients and their families.

### ***Reducing the Cost of Care***

Since first joining the Board of Supervisors, I have worked to see that VMC improve its financial sustainability. In years past, VMC has needed large subsidies from the County's General Fund budget. Because VMC has a 100% open door policy and provides safety net care for those in need, there will always be a need of some subsidy from the General Fund. However, recent improvements and efficiencies have seen that subsidy decline.

Many of the improvements to access and efficiency created to enhance health outcomes and patient satisfaction also improve the bottom line. For instance, operating rooms are extremely expensive when they aren't used well. The new scheduling protocols have facilitated more surgeries as well as savings. In another example, the increased use of non-traditional appointments have freed up doctors to see more patients.

Digitizing health records was another important mandate under the Affordable Care Act. It was a massive undertaking for our county. It took hundreds of employees from every division, department, and unit of the hospital to make it a reality.

The system, called HealthLink, was well worth the effort. It is an enormous time and cost saver, as doctors, nurses, and clerical workers avoid many of the difficulties experienced tracking down patient information using old-fashioned paper charts. The efficiencies have improved wait times while giving patients greater access to their health information through VMC's online portal.

Increased capacity and improved services, have made VMC more attractive to County residents. More people are using the hospital, bringing in more money. Our hospital census is up 5.5% over last year. Furthermore, more of those patients are insured under the Affordable Care Act. In fact, number of uninsured patients at VMC has dropped 80% over the last year.

Finally, VMC has improved its overall billing practices. HealthLink ensures that VMC is tracking all billable services and reporting them for payment. Improved staffing and protocols have put VMC's monthly billing production is at its highest recorded level. 2014 collections were \$111 million above 2013 levels.

I am so proud of all of the changes VMC has made toward improving its Triple Aim. That doesn't mean that challenges don't still exist. We still need to increase our primary care capacity further and hire more doctors to fill that need. Improvements need to be made in scheduling and communications for patients that are not part of VMC's primary care system, and our world-class maternity facilities are underutilized by the community. Despite that, VMC has become a truly great hospital, and it is only getting better.

As always, I encourage you to contact my office if you have any concerns or are interested in additional information. You can reach me at (408) 299-5040 or via e-mail at [Supervisor.Yeager@bos.sccgov.org](mailto:Supervisor.Yeager@bos.sccgov.org).

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Joint Public Safety Women's Career Day Symposium:

Santa Clara County Public Safety Agencies are seeking female candidates. The County Sheriff and County Fire will be hosting a Joint Career Day Symposium. Attendees can explore what it's like to be in law enforcement or fire service at this free event.

#### Intro to Women in the Fire Service

**What:** The day will feature hands-on workshops exploring what it is like to be a firefighter. Participants will extend a hose line into a smoke filled structure, feel the weight of the "Jaws of Life" and other life-saving equipment, climb a 75 foot ladder atop a ladder truck, and experience a sample of firefighter fitness testing.

**When:** Saturday, March 21 from 8 a.m. to noon.

**Where:** Sunnyoaks Station, 485 West Sunnyoaks Ave., Campbell

**More Information:** Pre-register at [info@sccfd.org](mailto:info@sccfd.org) or by calling (408) 378-4010.

#### Intro to Women in Law Enforcement

**What:** The day will feature workshops and physical agility practice. Information workshops include a panel discussion, Q&A, and discussion of the background process. There will also be a six-foot wall demonstration, 165-pound dummy drag, and a 99 yard foot pursuit obstacle course.

**When:** Saturday, March 21 from 1 to 5 p.m.

**Where:** Justice Training Center, 19050 Malaguerra Ave., Morgan Hill

**More Information:** Pre-register by emailing [WLES@sheriff.sccgov.org](mailto:WLES@sheriff.sccgov.org).

### Junior League Rummage Sale

**What:** The Junior League of San Jose is hosting its 24th Annual Rummage Sale. All are invited to this free event, in which attendees can explore 45,000 square feet of bargains. Items for sale will include baby supplies, sporting goods, electronics, housewares, and much more. For most of the day, a free community health and services fair will also take place, featuring over 30 healthcare and community service agencies.

**When:** Saturday, March 21 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**Where:** Expo Hall, Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, 344 Tully Road, San Jose

**More Information:** Call (408) 264-3058 or visit <http://www.jlsj.org/rummage-sale>.

### Staying Healthy: Preventive Health for Adults

**What:** The internet is full of preventive health information, but it can be unclear what information to trust. Dr. Andrew Schechtman will be giving an informative talk on topics including: ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight, how much exercise is needed, and strategies for the prevention and early detection of heart disease and cancer. Dr. Schechtman is a board certified physician in the specialty of Family Medicine. He graduated from UCLA School of Medicine and has developed special interests in travelers' health and the use of information technology in healthcare. He has worked with Doctors without Borders and started the company MeisterMed to develop medical references for use by doctors at the point-of-care.

**Where:** Campbell Library, 77 Harrison Ave., Campbell

**When:** Monday, March 23 at 7 p.m.

**More Information:** Email [Campbell\\_Manager@sccl.org](mailto:Campbell_Manager@sccl.org).

### **Urban Foraging: Edible Weeds and Plants in Your Backyard**

**What:** Join Guadalupe River Park Conservancy and urban foraging enthusiast Jeremy Dalton for a workshop on finding and cooking edible weeds. Jeremy will teach participants how to identify edible plants and then lead the class on a foraging excursion around the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens. Finally, the class will come back to the Visitor Center to cook up some of the fruits of their labor. This class is open to all ages, but minors must be accompanied by an adult. Pre-registration is required, and space is limited.

**When:** Saturday, March 28 from 10 a.m. to noon.

**Where:** Guadalupe Visitor & Education Center, 438 Coleman Ave, San Jose

**More Information:** Call (408) 298-7657.

### **Notario Fraud Workshops**

**What:** The District Attorney's Office is launching a multiple-week campaign to prevent "notario" fraud. Notarios are individuals who often promise legal immigration assistance to unsuspecting victims. They are not lawyers or valid accredited representatives, and in some cases they charge thousands of dollars for false promises of assistance. The notario prevention campaign will consist of bi-lingual presentations on fraud prevention. These free, public seminars will include presentations by legitimate immigration lawyers as well as immigrant rights advocates.

**When:** Tuesday, April 7 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

**Where:** Alum Rock Public Library, 3090 Alum Rock Ave., San Jose

**More Information:** Contact Deputy DA Josue Fuentes at (408) 792-2946.

### **Spring Garden Market**

**What:** The Friends of Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County invite members to the 21st Annual Spring Garden Market. The event includes a massive plant sale, gardening talks, educational information tables, a large vendor fair, eight gourmet food trucks and much more. Relax in the beautiful, tree-shaded History San Jose Park at the picnic tables while listening to a garden talk and enjoying a snack from the gourmet food trucks.

**When:** Saturday, April 11 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Where:** History San Jose, 1650 Senter Road, San Jose

**More Information:** Email [lslawecki@yahoo.com](mailto:lslawecki@yahoo.com) or visit <http://mastergardeners.org/sgm>.

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