

A PUBLICATION OF WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL

HEALTH **matters**[®]

WINTER 2023

CUTTING-EDGE CANCER CARE

How a Clinical Trial Helped One Patient Fight Lung Cancer




**A LONG JOURNEY
TO A SPINAL FIX**

**ARE YOU SITTING
TOO MUCH?**

**GET YOUR Z's
FOR HEART HEALTH**

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From the desk of

Susan Fox

PRESIDENT AND CEO



The Cardiac Surgery team at White Plains Hospital gathered to celebrate the extraordinary outcomes achieved during the first year of the program.

HEALTH matters

WINTER 2023

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Cover photo: Ken Gabrielsen

THE NEW YEAR IS UPON US, and it's the perfect time to set new goals and reassess your health priorities. An easy way to get started is to schedule your regular checkups and screenings. In this issue, we help guide you by highlighting the recommended screenings you need in each decade of life (*see page 14*).

Preventive medicine is the key to living a longer, healthier life, and that starts with taking care of your heart. Heart disease is the number-one killer in the United States, according to the CDC. As February is American Heart Month, we explore the health risks of sitting too much, as well as the ways a good night's sleep benefits your heart. At White Plains Hospital, we continue to add new services to our comprehensive cardiac care program, including a new cardiogenetics specialty (*see page 4*) and our world-class cardiac surgery program, which has exceeded national performance metrics in its first year under the direction of renowned surgeon Dr. Robert Michler.

We are always looking for new ways to bring high-quality care to our community. In this issue, you can learn about one patient, Renee Davis, who was diagnosed with lung cancer. Renee was the first patient to participate in a groundbreaking

clinical trial at White Plains Hospital's Center for Cancer Care. We are proud to offer a number of new treatments that give hope to patients like Renee, who are living with cancer.

As always, White Plains Hospital remains committed to investing in the health of our community year-round. We are pleased that our team of talented physicians and staff have expanded once again, with the Hospital's recent addition of Maple Medical Group. As a practice, Maple Medical has been part of the fabric of White Plains and the greater Westchester community, and has had a long-standing relationship with our Hospital for more than 35 years. We are thrilled to have their specialists join the White Plains Hospital Physician Associates family.

No matter where you are located or where you are in your health journey, you can count on us to help you make 2023 your healthiest year yet!

Yours in good health,

Susan Fox
President and CEO
White Plains Hospital

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To receive more helpful tips and content from White Plains Hospital, visit wphospital.org/stayconnected

HINOKI & IZZO PHOTO BY KEN GABRIELSEN.

For A+ Heart Health, Get Your Z's

Settling in for a good night's sleep is one of the best things you can do to keep your heart healthy.

BY MELISSA PHETERSON

EAT WELL. EXERCISE. DON'T

SMOKE. These are common tips to enhance heart health. But did you know that ample sleep is just as important?

The American Heart Association added sleep to its checklist of essentials for cardiovascular health in 2022. That means there's never been a better time to prioritize getting a good night's sleep.



American Heart Association.

"The evidence is now overwhelming that quality sleep contributes to heart health," says Dr. Fulvia Milite, Sleep Medicine Specialist and Director of the Sleep Center at White Plains Hospital. "Sleep deprivation has been linked to a range of heart conditions. And sleep quality is just as important as quantity. For those who have disruptive snoring or interrupted breathing, as happens with sleep apnea, the risk of heart



Fulvia Milite, MD
Sleep Medicine
Specialist

disease increases even more."

Dr. Milite breaks down what you need to know:

Sleep now or feel the impacts later.

"During sleep, your heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate all have the chance to come down," Dr. Milite explains. "Sleep disruption and deprivation take away this window of opportunity to rest and recover. Eventually, blood pressure that doesn't dip at night may increase during the day, forcing your heart to work harder." Insufficient sleep can also strain the heart by heightening the risk of weight gain. "Because sleep impacts levels of hormones that regulate appetite and control blood sugar, those who are sleep-deprived often have cravings or increased desire for high-calorie foods," she adds.

Aim for seven hours of sleep every night.

"Seven hours is the goal, but it varies, depending on the person," Dr. Milite explains. "Sleep deprivation is defined as less than six hours of sleep per night."

Watch for signs of sleep deprivation.

How do you know if you're sleep deprived? Some likely hints

include feeling drowsy doing daily activities, especially driving; struggling to function during the day; sleeping in for three hours on the weekends; and relying on caffeine to feel awake and alert, Dr. Milite explains. "If you feel happy, productive, and alert during the day, you're likely getting sufficient, quality sleep," she notes.

Make sleep a top health priority.

"Sleep permeates every aspect of our health. Unfortunately, many people still measure their productivity by how little sleep they get," Dr. Milite says. "It's important to stay active, but balance exercise with rest." So, if you're setting an alarm to hit the gym before dawn, remember that sufficient sleep is just as important as exercise.

Try a sleep study.

"At our Sleep Center, the goal for patients is quality sleep without disruptions," says Dr. Milite. For those with heart disease or diabetes, the Center coordinates with cardiologists, endocrinologists, and other specialists at the Hospital. For patients with sleep apnea, Dr.

Milite and her staff provide ongoing support beyond the diagnosis, making sure patients are using machines effectively and that they receive a mask that fits properly. "This is how our lab distinguishes itself — we don't just hand you a diagnosis and send you home. Our program also offers guidance on daytime or evening regimens to relieve insomnia and promote better sleep," she explains.

The bottom line: Healthy sleep habits go a long way toward boosting heart health!

Rest Up for Heart Health!

Insufficient sleep is now strongly linked to:

- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Atherosclerosis (the buildup of fat in the arteries)
- Heart arrhythmia
- Coronary artery disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Congestive heart failure

For more information about the Sleep Center or to make an appointment, call 914-681-2626.

Keeping Cardiac Care in the Family

White Plains Hospital's new cardiogenetics program screens families for inherited heart conditions that merit early intervention.



AS PART OF THE continued evolution of comprehensive cardiac care at White Plains Hospital, we now offer a way to treat cardiac issues that patients may not know they have. By adding the exciting field of cardiogenetics to our roster, we can screen patients for genetic mutations that increase risk of cardiac disease and then design early-intervention treatment options for preventive care. We are one of the only hospitals in the region to offer this “precision-medicine” capability.



Marc Waase, MD, PhD
Director of
Cardiogenetics

At the forefront of this innovative specialty is Dr. Marc Waase, Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, who joined the Hospital in July as Director of Cardiogenetics. Here, Dr. Waase answers some frequently asked questions about cardiogenetics.

How and why has cardiogenetics become so important?

“Cardiogenetics provides an exciting new tool to detect certain inherited heart conditions and determine potential early intervention to prevent future heart problems. It has dramatically increased our ability to detect signs of some nascent heart conditions before they become serious afflictions. The science of cardiogenetics first developed in the 1990s, with the discovery of genes causing long QT syndrome, a disorder of the heart’s electrical system, and hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a disease that causes a thickened heart muscle. Over the past 25 years, it has broadened to many other inherited cardiac conditions.

“The biggest factor behind the growth of cardiogenetics has been an increasing awareness that certain cardiac conditions are inherited and that lives can be saved by the timely recognition and initiation of preventive treatment. Heightened accessibility, ease, and quick turnaround of DNA testing—with results in two to six weeks—have also fueled the practice’s growth. Currently, most genetic testing and counseling occurs in academic institutions, so I am very pleased to bring this science to White Plains Hospital.”

What happens after results come back?

“My team and I meet with patients to review and discuss the results, their implications, and options to monitor or mitigate

risk. These can range from echocardiograms (ultrasound of the heart) and electrocardiograms to Holter monitors—small, portable devices that record the heart’s rhythm and are worn for 24 to 48 hours, connected to the chest by electrodes. Based on the findings, lifestyle and/or medication changes are implemented to keep illness in check; for other patients, I may recommend a cardiac ablation, pacemaker, or defibrillator.”

Who is a good candidate for cardiogenetic testing?

“Cardiogenetic testing is not something every cardiac patient needs to pursue. Current guidelines discourage physicians from running those tests for patients without signs or family history of heart conditions. Also, finding a genetic mutation does not necessarily mean that the patient has a cardiac condition. After all, some mutations are benign and therefore will not pose serious danger. Environmental factors, such as smoking and obesity—as opposed to genetic mutations—play a large role in many common cardiac diseases. Patients should consult with their cardiologists to determine whether cardiogenetic testing is right for their unique needs.”

How does a typical patient journey with cardiogenetics unfold?

“When screening one patient and their child, who both had a history of fainting, I discovered they had the genetic mutation responsible for long QT syndrome, which causes dangerously irregular heartbeats, or arrhythmias. If left untreated, this condition can increase one’s risk of sudden cardiac death. I started the parent on a common blood pressure medication called a beta blocker to reduce any arrhythmias and implanted a pacemaker/defibrillator to steady their heartbeat and help prevent sudden cardiac death. For the child, I prescribed medication. Both parent and child are now doing well. They have not had any further episodes of fainting — and no further arrhythmias.” —MP

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR HEART DISEASE?

Answer these simple questions to see if you should be screened by your doctor for heart disease. Visit exceptionaleveryday.org/heartdisease to take the quiz.

Are You Sitting Too Much?

From muscle strength to mental health, here are a few reasons to get up and move.

LET'S FACE IT: We could easily sit all day. Meetings, commutes, e-mails to review, and binge-worthy TV shows all leave us glued to some kind of chair for most of our waking hours. But too much sitting is toxic for your health. Dr. Matthew Zeppieri, Family Medicine Physician at White Plains Hospital Physician Associates, shares exactly how—and where—too much sitting is damaging your body. —MP

NECK AND SPINE

Slouching, craning our necks, and tilting our hips forward while sitting all jostle our spines out of alignment. **"The right posture is critical to avoiding back pain and neck pain,"** explains Dr. Zeppieri. One easy fix is to put your phone on speaker or use headphones instead of cradling your phone between your ear and shoulder. Also, remember to check your chair. "Adjust so that your knees are at or below your hips, your feet are on the floor, and your monitor is at eye level," he notes. Adding a lumbar pillow or even a rolled towel between your lower back and the chair can promote alignment and protect your spine.

HEAD AND MOOD

Too much sitting and screen-staring is actually counterproductive. After a while, you may find your eyesight blurred and your mind depleted, which means your body needs to move. "The consensus is that for every 60 minutes of work, you should **get up for about 10 to 15 minutes** to 'reboot' your focus," says Dr. Zeppieri. Even small bursts of activity can promote better sleep at night, which enhances your mood in the morning. Walk down the hall to speak with a colleague instead of sending an email, or set a calendar reminder or timer on your phone to get up and move regularly.



Matthew Zeppieri, MD
Family Medicine

WAIST AND WEIGHT

"Excessive sitting can lead to weight gain because you're not burning off the calories you're taking in," Dr. Zeppieri says. **Sitting too much increases the chance of excess fat around the waist**, which is especially concerning. "A waistline greater than 40 inches [for men] and 35 inches [for women] increases the risk of heart disease and other issues." Make sure to get at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity exercise, as recommended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

BONES, JOINTS, AND MUSCLES

"Muscles need activity to remain strong, and our joints are designed to handle only so much weight. I often see patients with osteoarthritis, muscle fatigue, and even chronic pain from sitting too much. **Even brief increments of being active reduce the risk of these conditions developing,**" he notes.

LEGS AND FEET

Sitting too long can cause fluid retention and deep vein thrombosis, or blood clots, that typically present in the thighs or the legs. **Moving around is essential to jump-start blood flow** throughout the body.





Putting Patients' Best Faces Forward

White Plains Hospital's new reconstructive surgeon offers patient-driven care to restore both form and function to our most personal features.

WHEN PATIENTS COME to see Dr. Anisha Kumar, she reminds them who the true expert in the exam room is: themselves. "I give my professional opinion, but more importantly, I hand the patient a mirror and say, 'Tell me what *you* are most concerned about,'" she says. Their reflections inform her approach.



Anisha Kumar, MD
Director of Facial
Plastic and
Reconstructive
Surgery

As the newly hired Director of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Dr. Kumar broadens the capabilities of White Plains Hospital Physician Associates to include facial reconstruction in conjunction with other surgeries, such as those to remove skin cancer. This might mean filling in contours or closing wounds after tumor excisions (such as Mohs surgery) or reconstructing part of an ear following more complex cancer removal procedures. Dr. Kumar works closely with

colleagues such as Dr. Jk Rasamny and Dr. Brian Nicholas, surgeons who specialize in ear, nose, and throat medicine. "After the surgeon removes the cancer, I complete the facial reconstruction. Our physician group's seamless collaboration gives our patients the best possible experience," she explains.

Dr. Kumar also performs interventions for nerve paralysis, such as Bell's palsy, to correct asymmetries, drooping smiles, or eyelids that struggle to close. For one patient, who had resorted to taping her eyelid shut, Dr. Kumar implanted a thin platinum plate under the eyelid. That tiny bit of extra weight helped the eye stay closed, restoring tautness but also protecting the cornea from dryness and infection.

CULTURE MEETS CLINIC

The artistic component of reconstruction, executed with precision technique, complements Dr. Kumar's previous training as a classical dancer. "I am fascinated by form and function and how to optimize both in medicine," she says. She also draws from her undergraduate study at Harvard

in medical anthropology, which explores social and cultural factors that influence health and healing. "Time and again, I have seen how a person's identity and ability to communicate nonverbally through their expressions are directly related to their face," Dr. Kumar explains. "Understanding how a person perceives their face, how others perceive it, and why they internalize that awareness is unique to facial reconstruction. Reconstructive surgeons need to recognize these components."

When a patient walks in, she observes them carefully, picking up on even the most minute nuances. "How do they carry themselves? Are they trying to cover certain parts of their faces or using makeup to hide certain features?" But the best diagnostic tool, she stresses, is the patient's self-perception. "The ideal angle of a nose or height of an eyebrow is not necessarily important to the individual. At the end of the day, I want them to be happy with their results. Textbook-perfect doesn't mean patient-perfect, because each patient is unique," she explains. —MP

A New Approach to Stroke Prevention

The WATCHMAN, a game-changing device to help lower stroke risk among AFib patients, is now available at White Plains Hospital.

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION, or AFib, is an increasingly common medical problem. According to the American Heart Association, at least 2.7 million Americans live with

AFib, a quivering or irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia) that can lead to blood clots, heart failure, and other heart-related complications. It also increases the risk of stroke by five times, which can be devastating, paralyzing, and lethal.

The condition is one of our nation's biggest health concerns.

Blood-thinning medications are the main treatment for AFib, and they have been very successful in preventing strokes caused by the condition. However, not all AFib patients

are well-suited to lifetime doses of these anticoagulant medicines. Patients historically prone to bleeding who take blood thinners are often at increased risk for abnormal bleeding due to frequent falls, anemia, kidney failure, and gastrointestinal issues, among other conditions.

These patients haven't had another choice locally until recently, when White Plains Hospital introduced the WATCHMAN device. The device is implanted during a minimally invasive procedure known as left atrial appendage closure (LAAC), in which surgeons close off the small pouch found in the top left of the heart. This closure stops blood clots from escaping into the bloodstream, thus preventing strokes and embolisms. The electrophysiology team at White Plains Hospital completed its first WATCHMAN implant in August.

"LAAC is a minimally invasive procedure that requires a tremendous amount of expertise. We're proud to be able to offer this life-saving option at White Plains Hospital for AFib patients with a high risk of bleeding," says Dr. Daniel Wang, a board-certified Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, and the Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology at the Hospital. The addition of the WATCHMAN device is the latest in a number of exciting new cardiac procedures offered at White Plains Hospital. "The successful launch of this

groundbreaking AFib treatment, as well as the additions of catheter ablation of atrial fibrillation and our new cardiac surgery program, epitomize the power of collaboration between the Hospital and the Montefiore Health System," Dr. Wang says. •

White Plains Hospital's Cardiac Electrophysiology team is proud to offer the life-saving WATCHMAN implant to help reduce stroke risk.



Daniel Wang, MD
Director of Cardiac
Electrophysiology



Montefiore's Dr. Luigi Di Biasi and Dr. Daniel Wang successfully implanted the first WATCHMAN device at White Plains Hospital in August 2022.



Greenwich, CT

BY SAMANTHA GARBARINI

ONE OF THE OLDEST TOWNS in Connecticut, this coastal haven along Long Island Sound and just outside of Westchester County is rife with things to do. Sprawling parks, cultural institutions, and a Main Street stacked with shops and restaurants are just some of its draws. **Dr. Daniel Sammartino**, a Hematology and Oncology Specialist with White Plains Hospital Physician Associates, moved to Greenwich from New York City two years ago. “There’s a walkable downtown with a slight New England feel,” he says. “It’s suburban, but there’s a lot going on.” Here’s how he makes the most of his downtime—while staying healthy.

Take a Walk in the Park

The former estate of 19th-century banker J. Kennedy Tod, 147-acre **GREENWICH POINT PARK** has plenty of room to spread out on the waterfront. “Even on the nicest summer days, I don’t find it to be too crowded,” Dr. Sammartino says. “You can walk on the beach and trails, and it has a really nice view of the Manhattan skyline if you walk out on the point.” Park access is free from November to May (day passes can be purchased during the summer months), when residents can also nab a family-friendly permit for shell-fishing along designated areas.

11 Tods Driftway; 203-622-7700; greenwichct.gov



Power Up for the Day

“**GREGORYS COFFEE** is my favorite coffee shop around,” Dr. Sammartino says. “They have a lot of cold-brew options that are not terribly sweet.” The New York City-based roaster also serves a full slate of plant-based breakfast bites, curated by an in-house dietitian, including coconut-milk overnight oats with maple-quinoa granola and spicy avocado toast on Nordic rye. Pick up a bag of house blend or limited-edition single-origin beans on the way out, and Gregorys will donate a pair of eyeglasses to communities in the developing world.

342 Greenwich Ave; 203-900-4583; gregoryscoffee.com



Get a Culture Fix

Dedicated to the arts and sciences, the **BRUCE MUSEUM** is in the midst of a major transformation. Slated to reopen fully this spring (the art galleries are currently closed, while the grounds and science exhibitions remain open), the museum will more than double its footprint and debut \$50 million in new acquisitions, including artworks by Edward Hopper and Camille Pissarro. “Studies have shown art can help people with depression, anxiety, and stress,” Dr. Sammartino says. “Art has also been linked to improved memory and reasoning in aging adults.” 1 Museum Dr; 203-869-0376; brucemuseum.org



Break a Sweat

“The great thing about **EQUINOX** is that they have really good classes,” says Dr. Sammartino, who often attends athletic conditioning and spin sessions. “They push you to do workouts you wouldn’t otherwise do on your own.” In addition to the 100-plus weekly classes, the gym has a spa for post-workout massages and other treatments. A little sweat equity can benefit your mental health, too. “Go and clear your head after work, even if it’s a 20- or 30-minute workout,” Dr. Sammartino recommends.

16 Old Track Rd; 203-863-0070; equinox.com

Go Out on the Town

Greenwich Avenue’s restaurant row serves as an area hotspot on weekends. Dr. Sammartino is particularly fond of **HINOKI**, a sleek *izakaya* that opened in 2021. “It’s a great new restaurant. It’s fun, lively, and always crowded,” he says. The small-plates menu mixes indulgent bites like uni-topped foie gras toast and truffle-scented dumplings with healthier fare, including fresh sashimi and lettuce wraps piled with chicken and shrimp. “You can eat a bit lighter because you’re not having main courses,” Dr. Sammartino says.

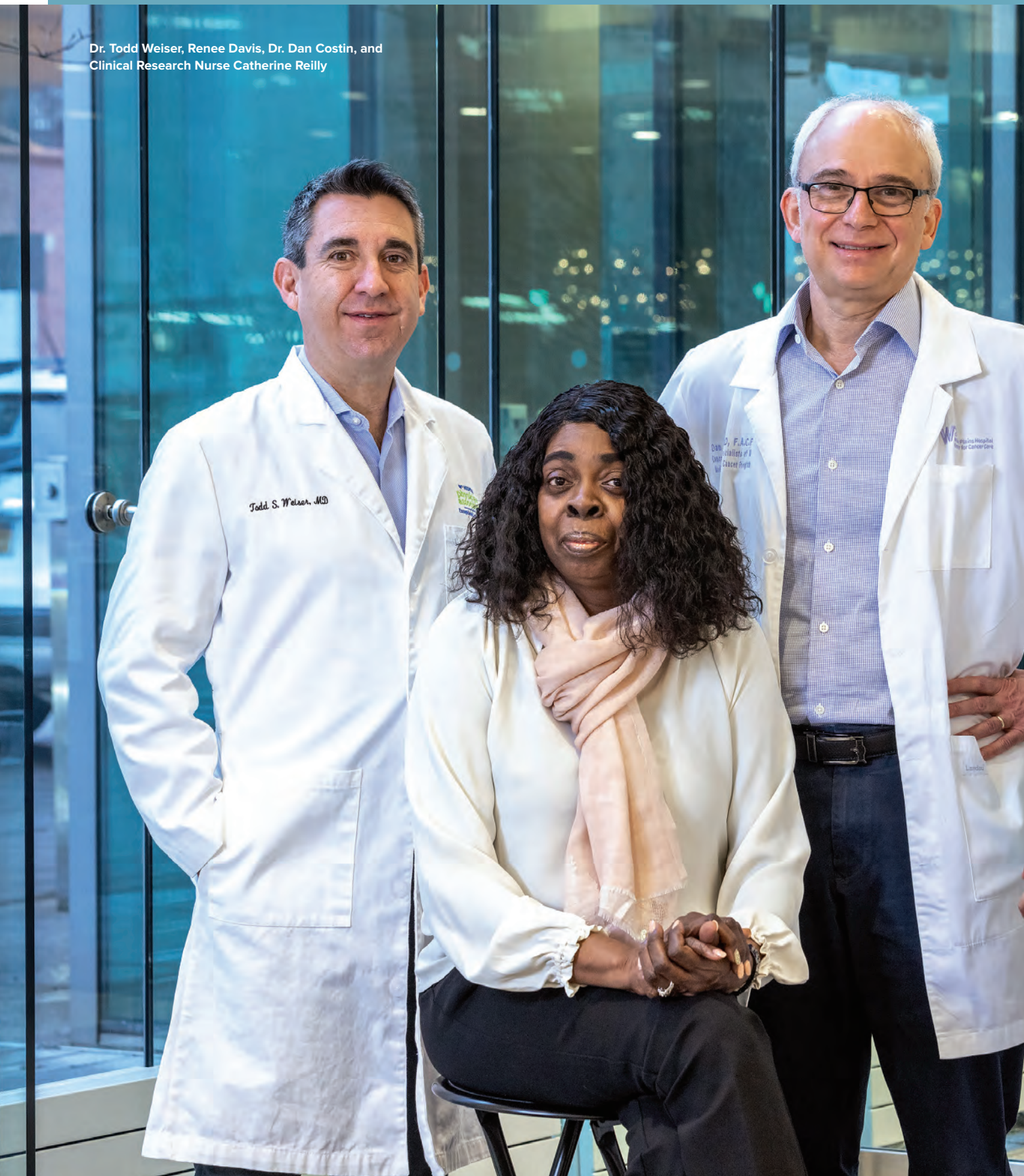
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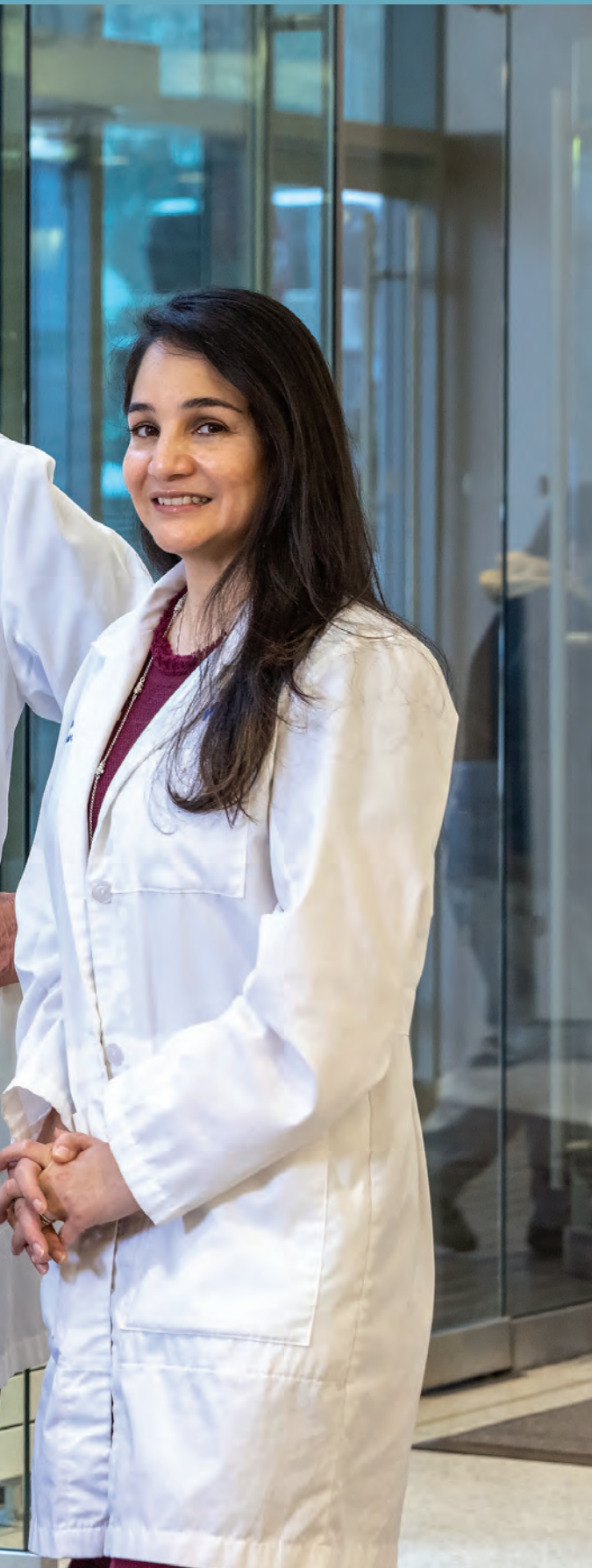


ELEVATING CANCER CARE

Board-certified in Clinical Oncology, Hematology and Internal Medicine, Dr. Sammartino brings a high level of cancer expertise to White Plains Hospital Physician Associates. He has managed a number of clinical trials, working with the Food and Drug Administration, the Harvard Cancer Center Institutional Review Board, and various pharmaceutical companies. A member of both the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the American Society of Hematology, Dr. Sammartino’s clinical interests and expertise include cancer of the lung, bladder, head and neck, and gynecologic and hematologic cancers.

Dr. Todd Weiser, Renee Davis, Dr. Dan Costin, and
Clinical Research Nurse Catherine Reilly





FROM A TRIAL to A CURE

Renee Davis was terrified to learn she had lung cancer. But White Plains Hospital's excellent doctors—and its access to a cutting-edge clinical study—gave her hope for a cure.

By Deborah Skolnik | Photos by Ken Gabrielsen

It's hard to imagine how a health emergency could turn out to be a positive. But that's exactly what it was for Renee Davis, 67, a White Plains resident and supermarket clerk. Although her crisis was a severe allergic reaction, it uncovered another potentially deadly problem: lung cancer.

Davis' journey began in late 2019, when, out of the blue, she felt an odd sensation on her face. "I looked at it in the mirror and thought, *Holy smokes!*" she recalls. "It was all swollen." Soon, she began to have trouble breathing. She drove to urgent care and was sent immediately to White Plains Hospital's Emergency Department, where she was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. The physicians worked to stop the swelling and keep her airway open. Fortunately, after two days, she recovered. The likely allergen was identified as Davis' blood pressure medication, and she was switched to a different drug.

Yet her worries weren't over—a CT scan she received during treatment showed an unexplained mass. At a follow-up visit, she was directed to see Dr. Todd Weiser, the Hospital's Director of Thoracic Surgery. Davis was understandably nervous, wondering what would come next, but as soon as she met Dr. Weiser, she felt she could trust him.

“He was so nice and didn’t speak to me like he was superior to me,” she says. He quickly arranged for Davis to have a PET-CT scan, which would provide more detailed information on the changes in her lungs. What he saw was concerning. “The scan showed a large mass that was in the central part of her right lung, and the lymph nodes within her lung were enlarged,” Dr. Weiser says. He performed a lung biopsy as soon as possible, and it showed she had stage 2 lung cancer.

Davis was devastated by the news, but Dr. Weiser reassured her. “He told me he had my back and was going to do surgery to remove it,” she says. “Still, I went into the bathroom and fell to my knees. I wondered what I was going to tell my family. My older son was getting married in Mexico in July. I didn’t know if I’d be able to go to the wedding.”

Entering a clinical trial

The more immediate concern was to figure out what else, in addition to surgery, would give Davis the best chance of a complete recovery. At Dr. Weiser’s recommendation, Davis met with Dr. Dan Costin, Director of the White Plains Hospital Center for Cancer Care, who proposed that she enter a clinical study on lung cancer treatment in which the Hospital was participating. “It’s called Keynote 671,” Dr. Costin says. Participants, he explains, are divided into two groups. Both undergo chemotherapy *before* surgery rather than afterward, which is the standard treatment plan. In addition, during chemotherapy, half the patients receive immunotherapy, a treatment that helps the body’s immune system fight cancer. The other subjects get a placebo.

The purpose of the study is to establish immunotherapy’s usefulness for treating lung cancer at earlier stages of diagnosis. “We know it works very well if you have very advanced or stage 4 lung cancer,” Dr. Costin says. “Renee’s cancer was at an early stage, but it’s a stage where, unfortunately, a significant number of patients are destined to have a recurrence, even when they’ve had surgery and standard chemotherapy.” The trial, he told Davis, could potentially allow her to receive pembrolizumab, an immunotherapy drug that makes it difficult for cancer cells to hide from the immune system.

Despite knowing that the research project might give her access to cutting-edge treatment, Davis was hesitant. Her husband and two sons had reservations, too, wondering if the experimental drug might have unforeseen health consequences. “But then Dr. Costin explained it all to us during a visit,” Davis says. “He showed us photographs of different stages of cancer and explained why I was a very good candidate for the study and could potentially be helped a lot.” She and her family were convinced. “My older son said, ‘Mom, what do you have to lose?’”

The details of the study and treatment were further explained to Davis by Catherine Reilly, MPH, RN, a Clinical Research Nurse with the White Plains Hospital Center for Cancer Care. “I take care of patients who are enrolled in clinical trials,” Reilly explains. “In my initial discussions with them, we talk about the research study as a possible treatment option. I tell them about the purpose of the study and give them all the details. I also ensure that the patients meet the eligibility requirements for the clinical trial.”



“In addition, at any given time, we have approximately 30 trials that are actively enrolling patients and other studies with patients in follow-up,” Reilly continued. The Hospital is playing a key role in the pembrolizumab study, she notes, as one of 42 other research sites worldwide. The fact that White Plains Hospital was selected to be part of this curated handful reflects its excellence.

“We have built a state-of-the-art, cutting-edge Cancer Center, and as part of it, we have invested in developing a strong clinical trials office with an outstanding director and an excellent supporting staff,” says Dr. Costin. “We have also been able to convey the importance of clinical trial participation to physicians and providers caring for our cancer patients. And we have an established oncology pharmacy with an interest and expertise in clinical research. As a result, our program has been very attractive when sites are being selected for clinical trials.”

Facing the challenge bravely

Davis began what would be the first of four IV treatments in January 2020. “The people at the infusion center were really nice. They treated me with such kindness,” she shares. But that wasn’t the only good news: Davis also felt no adverse effects from the chemotherapy and potential immunotherapy. She went into each infusion session with an upbeat attitude, even wearing fancy outfits a couple of times. “The nurses asked me where I was going, and I told them I just came here like that because I hadn’t worn those kinds of clothes in a while, so I thought I’d get dressed up,” she says.

All wasn’t cheerful, however. In March, just as Davis was preparing for her third infusion, the pandemic began.



“I would tell anyone in my situation to go to White Plains Hospital. I thank God every day that I’m alive.”

—RENEE DAVIS

“Suddenly, we were in a situation where we were wondering if we could even bring our patients in to get standard chemotherapy, let alone if they were in clinical studies,” Dr. Costin says. Yet, White Plains Hospital took every possible step to make sure non-COVID patients were kept safe, and Davis still got the attention she needed. “We placed her on high priority. She never missed a treatment,” Dr. Costin explains.

The results of the infusions were astonishing. Screenings showed Davis’ tumor, which had originally measured more than 2.5 inches, was completely eradicated. Although she and Dr. Costin don’t know if she received immunotherapy or the placebo, the malignancy “literally melted away, which would be very unusual if you were getting chemotherapy alone,” he says. “We suspect that she got pembrolizumab, but either way, she had a terrific response. And this is why clinical studies are so important, because they’re entering into the frontier.”

Sweet victory

In May 2020, Davis had surgery to remove the last, tiny traces of her cancer. She was nervous, but Dr. Weiser had long ago

won her confidence. “I told him I was going to put my trust in him, and I wanted him to understand that I’d already asked God to guide his hands,” she says. Using minimally invasive techniques, Dr. Weiser took out the lingering remnants of the malignancy, an area which measured only a couple of millimeters. “There was no residual tumor in something that had once been the size of a golf ball,” Dr. Weiser notes. He removed several lymph nodes for testing, as well, and they were cancer-free. “Renee did great with the surgery,” he says, adding that she returned home after just three days.

Dr. Costin gave Davis maintenance medication to further minimize the risk of a recurrence. She finished the regimen in March of 2021.

“I would tell anyone in my situation to go to White Plains Hospital,” Davis says. “I thank God every day that I’m alive.” She was especially grateful that she was able to attend her son’s wedding. “I thought, *I made it!*” she shares. It was a cherished chance to see her son begin a new, happy chapter of his life—while she began a new, healthy chapter of her own. •

MAKE THIS YOUR

Healthiest



The flip of the calendar year is a great time to reset, take stock of your healthcare needs, and jumpstart your wellness journey. In order to keep your body as healthy as possible throughout the year, **it's important to set up certain necessary doctor visits on an annual basis.** Scheduling in advance is a smart strategy, so you'll be well prepared.

At your annual physical, expect your clinician to **check your vitals and conduct a thorough physical exam** to see how your body is faring. Your doctor will also use this time to discuss your **vaccination schedule and recommended screenings** that make sense given your age and risk factors.

HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD SCREEN FOR, BY AGE:

● Everyone ● Women ● Men

IN YOUR 30s

BLOOD PRESSURE Every year at annual checkup

CHOLESTEROL Every year at annual checkup

CERVICAL CANCER Regular screenings with Pap smear

BREAST CANCER Annual mammogram and breast MRI for women with high-risk factors

DIABETES Every year, as determined by your physician

HEPATITIS C At least once in a lifetime for all adults aged 18 years and older

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES Periodically, throughout life, for sexually active individuals

IN YOUR 40s

BLOOD PRESSURE Every year at annual checkup

CHOLESTEROL Every year at annual checkup

CERVICAL CANCER Regular screenings with Pap smear

DIABETES Every year, as determined by your physician

COLORECTAL CANCER Average-risk screenings start at age 45; earlier for those with high-risk factors

BREAST CANCER Yearly mammogram, with a breast sonogram or MRI as needed*

PROSTATE CANCER Blood tests for prostate-specific antigen (PSA) may be recommended for high-risk men, and African American men starting at age 45



Year Get!

A quick, go-to guide for all the preventive care you need to live your best life in 2023.



“Regular physical checkups are so important because they allow a primary care doctor to fully assess a patient’s healthcare needs for the year. It’s also a **great preventive measure, helping to promote early detection** of more serious issues,” explains Dr. Michael Zuckman, Primary Care Physician at White Plains Hospital Physician Associates in Armonk.

Women should also be sure to schedule a gynecological “well visit” each year and everyone should get a dilated eye exam with intraocular pressure at least every five years, even with normal vision.

IN YOUR 50s

BLOOD PRESSURE Every year at annual checkup

CHOLESTEROL Every year at annual checkup

CERVICAL CANCER Regular screenings with Pap smear

DIABETES Every year, as determined by your physician

COLORECTAL CANCER Colonoscopy every 10 years* for average-risk patients

BREAST CANCER Yearly mammogram, with a breast sonogram or MRI as needed

OSTEOPOROSIS Bone density test (DEXA scan) recommended for post-menopausal women

LUNG CANCER Regular screening from ages 50 to 80 for individuals with a 20-pack-a-year smoking history, who currently smoke, or quit within the past 15 years

PROSTATE CANCER Blood tests for prostate-specific antigen (PSA) for average-risk men

IN YOUR 60s

ABDOMINAL AORTIC ANEURYSM

Screening recommended for men 65-75 who ever smoked

BLOOD PRESSURE Every year at annual checkup

CHOLESTEROL Every year at annual checkup

CERVICAL CANCER Speak with your doctor to see if you need to continue cervical cancer screening*

DIABETES Every year, as determined by your physician

COLORECTAL CANCER Colonoscopy every 10 years for average-risk patients

BREAST CANCER Yearly mammogram, with a breast sonogram or MRI as needed

OSTEOPOROSIS Bone density test (DEXA scan) every two years for women age 65+*

LUNG CANCER Regular screening from ages 50 to 80 for individuals with a 20-pack-a-year smoking history, who currently smoke, or quit within the past 15 years

PROSTATE CANCER Blood tests for prostate-specific antigen (PSA) for average-risk men

IN YOUR 70s+

BLOOD PRESSURE Every year at annual checkup

CHOLESTEROL Every year at annual checkup

CERVICAL CANCER Speak with your doctor to see if you need to continue cervical cancer screening

DIABETES Every year, as determined by your physician

COLORECTAL CANCER Colonoscopies through age 75; people ages 76-85 should decide with their medical providers whether to continue screenings*

BREAST CANCER Yearly mammogram, with a breast sonogram or MRI as needed

OSTEOPOROSIS Bone density test (DEXA scan) every two years

LUNG CANCER Screening recommended through age 80 if you are at increased risk due to smoking*

PROSTATE CANCER Speak with your doctor to see if you need to continue screening*

* Please note that screening recommendations for this condition have changed from the prior decade

HERE FOR YOUR HEALTH Schedule physicals, screenings, and other preventive care visits at any of our dozens of locations across Westchester. For more detailed information on where to find us, visit www.wphphysicianassociates.org/locations

A Quest to Get Back in Action

After multiple surgeries, one patient's congenital spine condition gets a final fix from White Plains Hospital's Dr. Andrew Casden and Dr. Kaushik Das.

BY STACEY PFEFFER • PHOTOS BY KEN GABRIELSEN



A former fitness buff who endured debilitating pain for years, Kevin Izzo is now healthy and active once again.

LIFE OFTEN THROWS YOU CURVEBALLS.

This is what Kevin Izzo discovered when he first met with Dr. Andrew Casden in 2008. Dr. Casden, now Chief of Orthopedics and Spine Surgery at White Plains Hospital, was a spine surgeon at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City at the time.

Izzo, a 30-year-old fitness buff who worked out frequently—his routine included long runs and completing dozens of push-ups a day—appeared the picture of strength and health. But a diagnosis of congenital stenosis (narrowing around the spinal cord) in the cervical, or neck, region of the spinal column led him to Dr. Casden. It was the beginning of a journey that lasted roughly 15 years.

When he first began having symptoms, in 2008, it was mostly fatigue. Izzo thought he was overdoing it at the gym. “I didn’t think it was anything serious at first,” recalls Izzo. But then he woke up one day with severe “foot drop,” which is an inability to lift the front part of his foot.

After a week, he noticed some other concerning symptoms, including a hitch in his walk and severe weakness throughout his body. He could barely do two push-ups. In addition, his right hand had become

“claw-like,” and he couldn’t manipulate it properly.

His primary doctor referred him to a local neurologist, who ordered an MRI that showed severe congenital narrowing around the spinal cord in the cervical region of Izzo’s spine, which controls movement of the arms and legs. If he didn’t have surgery soon, the neurologist told him, he could be paralyzed.

Izzo was referred to Dr. Casden. Given the progression of his condition, Dr. Casden felt surgery was the only option.

Dr. Casden says spinal stenosis is typically seen in older patients and develops gradually over time, so having a young patient like Izzo with such severe narrowing and rapid onset of symptoms was a cause for concern.

“The pressure on the spinal cord due to the congenital narrowing was causing his spinal cord to function improperly. It could not transmit the impulses from his brain to his arms and legs,” Dr. Casden says.

Izzo felt comfortable with his surgeon right away. “Dr. Casden has this cut-and-dried way of explaining things,” he recalls. “He did not sugarcoat the severity

of my case. He told me I had to make decisions in real time because the changes for me were so rapid.”

A SERIES OF SURGERIES

Dr. Casden performed Izzo’s first surgery in 2008. It was a cervical discectomy and fusion, which is a type of neck surgery that involves removing damaged discs and spurs of bone to relieve spinal cord pressure. To do this, Dr. Casden made an incision through the front of the neck and, after removing the discs and spurs, replaced them with a titanium cage and plate, causing the bone above and below the discs to grow together. Izzo had significant improvement of his preoperative symptoms and resumed his lifestyle.

Three years later, with the compression again progressing, Izzo underwent another procedure with Dr. Casden, allowing him to regain his strength and mobility once again.

The story unfortunately doesn’t end there. In 2019, Izzo was hit by a car while walking in a crosswalk at a local shopping



From left: Dr. Andrew Casden, Dr. Kaushik Das, and Kevin Izzo

center, and his painful spinal journey began anew. He was taken to a local hospital for preliminary X-rays, but the pain was everywhere, he recalls: in his back, hips, head, and legs. He underwent physical therapy, as well as acupuncture and spinal injections, but nothing helped.

Izzo was in constant pain every day—so severe that he couldn’t even pick up his newborn daughter. He was in need of another surgery, this time lower on his neck, near his shoulder blades.

Thinking he had to have the procedure at a major New York City hospital, Izzo had another surgery in 2020 at a Manhattan hospital with a different surgical team. Unfortunately, almost 18 months later, he was still in constant agony and was once again developing weakness in his legs and difficulty walking. Desperate for relief, the Long Island resident reconnected with Dr. Casden at White Plains Hospital.

FINDING WORLD-CLASS CARE AT WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL

Izzo could hardly walk when he saw Dr. Casden again in March 2022, in the Center for Orthopedic and Spine Surgery at White Plains Hospital. He needed complex revision spine surgery, and Dr. Casden quickly assembled the expert colleagues needed to handle Izzo’s complicated case, including neurosurgeon Dr. Kaushik Das, who joined the Hospital in January. “I had this whole team of superstars in the system, providing me with personal attention,” explains Izzo.

Drs. Casden and Das determined that residual compression from the last surgery was causing Izzo’s pain and weakness. They performed a laminectomy, removing some of the bone covering the spinal cord in the back of the neck while also revising the existing screws and rods. “Extensive preoperative imaging was necessary to completely understand the anatomy of his previously treated spine, so we could safely accomplish our surgical goals,” explains Dr. Casden.

“There was still significant compression of Kevin’s spinal cord,”

adds Dr. Das. “During surgery, we were able to identify the key area and successfully decompress the spinal cord.”

The Hospital’s state-of-the-art technology helped ensure a successful outcome. Intraoperative computer guidance (the “O Arm”) identified the area of Izzo’s residual compression, explains Dr. Casden. The team also used a surgical microscope to “tease off” bones and ligaments from the spinal cord, so it had more room to function properly. In addition, they utilized intraoperative neuromonitoring (IONM) to perform surveillance of Izzo’s spinal cord, which was at risk during the surgery. “Any changes in the IONM during surgery would necessitate swift action to prevent permanent spinal cord damage,” says Dr. Casden. At the

surgery’s conclusion, a plastic surgeon expertly closed the incision, minimizing Izzo’s pain at the incision site.

Almost a year post-surgery, Izzo says he “feels amazing and stronger,” thanks to the care he received at White Plains Hospital. “Kevin traveled from Mineola to White Plains Hospital; that says a lot about the level of care you’ll find here,” notes Dr. Casden. “We are doing complex revision spinal surgery that used to be done only at major university hospitals.”

In 2022, The Joint Commission, the nation’s leading, and largest, independent accrediting body in healthcare, recognized White Plains Hospital as a Spine Center of Excellence.

Izzo is grateful for his entire experience at the Hospital, especially considering how bad his condition had become. “The whole process, from the lead-up to surgery through discharge, instilled about as much comfort and confidence as a patient could possibly have in a team and a hospital,” he says. •



GET TO KNOW

Doreen Hollis

BY STACEY PFEFFER

DOREEN HOLLIS BEGAN WORKING at White Plains Hospital at the very height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a housekeeper in the Environmental Services Department, assigned to the Hospital's Emergency Department, Hollis' job was crucial: keep the ED clean and sterile so that COVID, or any other communicable disease, could not be passed on to incoming patients. "I was scared when I started working. My first few days on the job, I was definitely in the midst of it all," she explains. But she knew her role was important: "I kept the area spotless," she notes.

Before joining the ED, Hollis had never worked in a hospital. Her immediate previous job was at Stop & Shop, where she was in charge of artfully

displaying items on the shelves and ensuring that everything was neat and organized for shoppers during store remodels.

She exhibited the same natural talent for keeping things orderly when she joined White Plains Hospital. She also focused on putting a smile on patients' faces. In just under two years, Hollis was promoted to her current job as a unit clerk on Floor 5E, a medical-surgical unit. Her responsibilities include making sure the floor is fully stocked with medical items and that the pantry is loaded for hungry patients who may want a snack in between mealtimes.

She also takes phone calls from patients in her unit. "I have always worked in customer service, and I enjoy meeting people. If a patient needs something, I'll make it happen—even if it's something small, like having their lights turned off," she says.

Hollis credits her deep sense of empathy for patients to her relationship with her mother, Josephina, who lost her eyesight when Hollis was just 2 years old. Although she was visually impaired, her mother worked every day in an office, using a voice-activated computer. Before she died, a few years ago, she was an enthusiastic user of Alexa and Roku—which Hollis set up to make her mother's life easier and allow for more independence.

From time to time, Hollis interacts with visually impaired patients at the Hospital. One time, she recalls, "I came across a woman who was speaking in Spanish. I could tell she was visually impaired and asking for help with how to operate her call button." Always solution-oriented, the next day, Hollis brought the patient a set of small, raised, black stickers that she placed on the call button so the patient could feel where to press for help. "I've always felt a connection to the patients, especially those who are visually impaired," Hollis explains.

She continues to be an advocate for the visually impaired beyond the Hospital's doors. In her hometown of Mount Vernon, she fought for voice-activated crosswalks, a project near and dear to her late mother. She followed up with Mount Vernon mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard frequently and is proud to say that the city now has many voice-activated crosswalks in place.

"My mother gave me the energy to keep going.



An avid cook who loves making meals for her extended family, Doreen Hollis also works weekends at a Mount Vernon-based catering firm to learn the ins and outs of the industry.

Even if I am having a bad day, or visitors are upset, I show them that I care. My coworkers also know that I will go out of my way for them and check on them when they are sick," Hollis says.

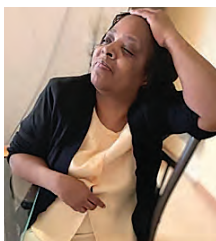
One such coworker is Shernelle Phillips-Proverbs, a housekeeper in the Environmental Services group. Phillips-Proverbs went out of her way to strike up a friendship with Hollis, and now the two Mount Vernon residents often commute together to work.

"Doreen is a gem. She always does things the correct way. She is a no-nonsense person, and she's very helpful, a true team player," remarks Phillips-Proverbs.

Not only is she a team player with coworkers, but she also plays that role with her extended family of four nephews and one niece, who reside in Mount Vernon as well. "Everybody plays a sport, so I see my niece and nephews on my days off and spend time with them. They give me energy, too, so that I can do my job," she says.

In her spare time, Hollis loves cooking for her extended family, including its vegan members, whom she's learned to cook for, despite her love of a good barbecue and her favorite dish, stuffed chicken breast. On weekends, she works as a server of a Mount Vernon-based business, Rowson Sideline Catering, learning the ins and outs of the catering trade.

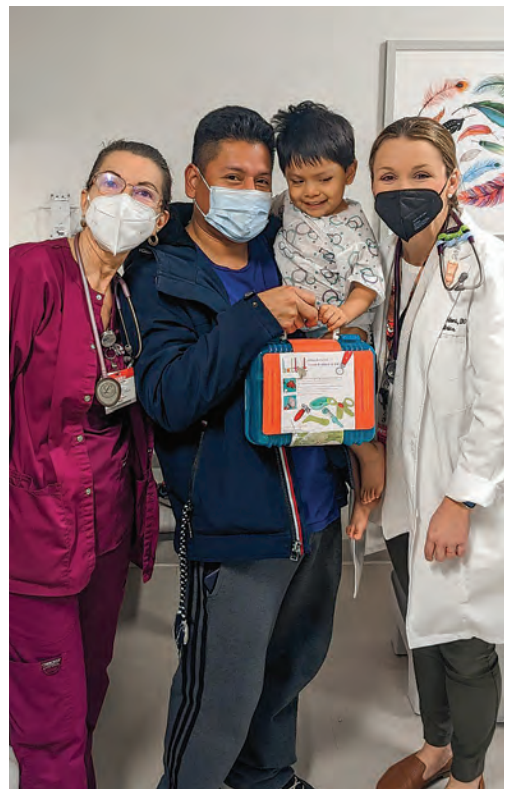
Whether she is creating delicious food for her family or putting smiles on patients' faces at the Hospital, Hollis' willingness to go above and beyond has a positive impact on everyone she encounters. •



Doreen Hollis' mother (left) always gave her the energy to keep going. "Even if I am having a bad day, or visitors are upset, I show them that I care," Doreen says.

CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY

White Plains Hospital staff members continue to reach out, give back, and share the importance of health and wellness.



On October 1, the annual Friends of White Plains Hospital gala was held at Westchester Country Club, celebrating the Hospital's advancements in care for our community. The gala was aptly titled "Better Together."

The Friends of White Plains Hospital donated toys, hats, gloves, socks, and toiletries to patients at WPH's Family Health Center this holiday season.



WPH hosted its first Youth Summit in partnership with the national organization Black Men in White Coats. More than 200 students and medical professionals attended the fully subscribed event for a day of learning, networking, and inspiration, with the goal of building the inclusive future of healthcare.



Once again, Farida Skincare Studio generously donated 10% of its October revenue to White Plains Hospital's Center for Cancer Care in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



White Plains High School's mariachi band treated WPH staff and community members to an on-site performance in celebration of Hispanic Heritage.



In October, together with El Centro Hispano, the Thomas H. Slater Center, and other community partners, WPH hosted its 45th Annual Neighborhood Health Fair and 3rd Annual See, Test and Treat program—providing free health screenings, health education, and healthy meals, in support of WPH's mission to broaden access to care in the community.

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN OUR EXCEPTIONAL TEAM

You have an opportunity to work side-by-side with some of the most talented people in the world. At White Plains Hospital, we have been widely recognized for our exceptional culture, world-class physicians, Magnet-designated nurses and passionate employees who make a real difference in our community. With tremendous growth opportunities, great benefits, and flexible work schedules, it is no wonder why we are consistently recognized as a *Great Place To Work*.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.

View our latest opportunities at wphospital.org/careers

To speak to someone on our team, call 914-681-1101 or email us at wphhr@wphospital.org

