

Horizons

A NEWSLETTER OF WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER // SEPTEMBER 2022



With nearly 70% of America's physicians completing training at the VA, complex type of Oral Maxillofacial expertise found in Wilkes-Barre directly contributes to the quality and access of Veteran health care both here and throughout the county.

DR. TARNJIT SAINI WINS THE DISTINGUISHED AWARD

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Wilkes-Barre is proud to announce that Dr. Tarnjit Saini has been selected as the recipient of the Lincoln R. Manson-Hing Award for Distinguished Service as a Scientific Reviewer for 2021 - 2022. The award is given out annually by the Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology section of the *Oral Surgery Oral Medicine Oral Pathology Oral Radiology Journal*.

Professor Manson-Hing was an educator and prolific author of innovative papers and books on dental radiology. He served as President of the American Academy of Dental Radiology, the precursor to the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology (AAOMR), from 1967 to 1968. He was also Editor of the Dental Journal during the 1970s.

The award is based on a report of reviewer metrics generated by the Elsevier web services records plus consideration of those reviewers who have provided long-term exemplary service and the quality of the reviews provided. The award will be presented at the AAOMR awards ceremony, to be held in Portland this month.

Dr Tarnjit Saini is a retired Army Colonel and Past professor of Radiology at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He is one of only two Oral Maxillofacial Radiologists in the whole VA system. With the perception that you must go to a bigger city like Philadelphia or New York to receive this type of oral care, it is nice to know that we have Dr Saini on staff right here in Wilkes-Barre.

Dr Saini also shares his expertise by providing consultation services on complex Oral Maxillofacial cases within the VA system.

A Message from the Director



Since March of 2020 we have all been bombarded with nonstop talk about viruses and vaccinations. Many of you might be ready to tune out the noise. It's called vaccine fatigue and tuning it out would be a mistake, especially

if it keeps you from getting a flu shot with a potentially severe flu season ahead. While not 100% effective, getting the flu vaccine lowers the odds of you getting seriously ill.

Without vaccination, getting the flu can be a springboard to bacterial pneumonia; sinus and ear infections and can worsen chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes. The flu and its complications kill tens of thousands of people every year. So, it is important not to listen to the noise and get your flu shot.

I would also recommend to all Veterans getting their flu shot to consider getting the new COVID-19 booster during the same visit. The new booster targets the now dominant Omicron variant. COVID-19 has become one of the nation's leading causes of death and getting the COVID-19 vaccine is a proactive way to lower your odds of becoming hospitalized.

Instead of being tired of hearing about vaccines, think of how lucky we are to live in a time where we have innovative medicine and technology to help keep us healthy. Getting any vaccine is a personal choice but being proactive instead of reactive when it comes to your health can be something that saves your life.

Sincerely,



Russell E Lloyd, Director



It's Flu Season Again

Flu season is here. Influenza or "flu" is a contagious respiratory virus we are all too familiar with. Getting your seasonal flu shot can protect you, your family, and your community. Unlike COVID-19 cases which we are seeing randomly throughout the year, flu season usually falls between October 1- March 31. Anyone may get the flu. However, when you are vaccinated your chances of getting severely ill are reduced. Flu has always been able to cause hospitalizations, and even death.

Flu is spread the same way COVID-19 is, through sneezes, coughs, talking or laughing. Droplets can spread up to 6 feet away from you. If you touch something with those droplets and not wash your hands, you might get sick. Those most at risk are people with a weakened immune system with illnesses such as asthma, chronic respiratory issues, diabetes, heart disease, HIV, kidney disease, and lung disease.

The CDC recommends everyone 6 months and over get the flu vaccine. The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu. It creates a reaction in your body to build immunity against the virus. Some people may have soreness, redness, and tenderness where the injection was given. Other reactions may be a low-grade fever, headache and muscle ache that goes away after 1-2 days.

While you're getting your flu shot, why not get the COVID-19 booster the same day? The benefits of being vaccinated for COVID-19 are the same as the flu. It might not protect you from getting COVID-19, but your risk of being severely ill from it is lower. Keep in mind, people who are taking medications that lower their immune system, or just have a lowered immune system in general, are at an increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness and death.

So, when Veterans schedule their flu shot with their primary care physician, why not schedule both the COVID-19 vaccine and the flu vaccine at the same visit? It is totally safe to be taken together on the same day. One thing to keep in mind is that if you had a reaction last time to the COVID-19 vaccine, you may have the same reaction to the booster. Prevention is the key and getting vaccinated will significantly reduce the chances of becoming severely ill.

Interim Guidance from CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance>

Jack's Weight Loss Journey Led Him to The Wilkes-Barre VA

Jack initially began the bariatric surgery candidacy at another medical facility. He went through an extensive pre-bariatric surgery process that took almost two full years, only to be told that he was not a surgery candidate at their facility. Searching for answers, a nurse mentioned to him that the Wilkes-Barre VA had a top-notch bariatric surgery program that he should investigate. He reached out to the Wilkes-Barre VA and spoke to Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery coordinator, Lynn Eckrote PA-C. Jack seemed comfortable from the start, stating that he was treated with respect and provided valuable guidance immediately. Jack was introduced to Dr. Chaudry, the program director, and they discussed a plan moving forward with which he was comfortable with.

Jack's weight loss journey prior to bariatric surgery was very up and down. He would successfully diet and lose weight for several months at a time, but he wasn't able to stay consistent long enough to sustain weight loss and eventually I would gain back more weight than he had lost. It was certainly deflating to him, and he knew he had to do something to change, and he believed he could, but he just needed a little nudge in the right direction. Jack was looking for permanent success, so he could feel healthy and more productive. He thought deeply about the decision to have bariatric surgery and weighed the pros and cons of how it would impact his life.

Being a candidate for bariatric surgery was a goal Jack had been working toward for more than two years and after doing some research and speaking with Dr. Chaudry and his staff, he felt tremendously confident in their abilities and that they were masters of their craft. With everything going well, he elected to have bariatric surgery.

The service and help he received from the nurses, dietitian, the operating room staff and the anesthesiologist was first rate.

"Everyone at The Wilkes-Barre VA treated me well and I have nothing but praise and respect for them and everything they did for me. The help I received allowed me to eliminate the biggest issue I had in my life, and I am very grateful for everything they helped me with."

—Jack B.

Since Jack's initial consult, he has lost more than 118 pounds and has improved his physical movement. He can exercise longer and harder than before and his cholesterol and triglyceride issues have improved. With less body weight, his joints are absorbing less impact and therefore he has less pain.

"I have increased self-confidence, and I have been much more productive in my career. My motivation is very high, and it has set me up for a more successful and healthy future."

—Jack B.

The bariatric surgery program at the Wilkes-Barre VA maintains the highest standards of patient safety and is the only federal facility nationally, including Department of Defense facilities, to be accredited by the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program (MBSAQIP). Much of the program's success runs in conjunction with our Veterans participating in the Wilkes-Barre VA's MOVE Weight Loss Program. By staying committed to changing their lifestyle, the Wilkes-Barre VA has helped Veterans achieve great outcomes. For more information about these programs, speak to your primary care team.



All artist renderings/pictures shown are for illustration purposes only. They are not meant to be an exact rendition. As the project evolves it is subject to change without notice.



Parking Garage Project Progressing, **ON TIME TO OPEN SPRING** in 2023

The parking garage project is progressing as scheduled at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. The structure is starting to take shape with the concrete retaining walls in place. The next step is to install the concrete base, which will act as the anchor for the precast permanent sections scheduled to be delivered within the next few months.

With the temporary parking lot finished, the Medical Center has gained approximately 20 more parking spaces than

we're losing during the construction phase. The parking garage will consist of 3 levels with the capacity to add 3 more levels if needed in the future.

When finished, the parking garage exit will lead Veterans into the north entrance of the Medical Center by the pharmacy and next to the newly opened canteen and retail store.

Wilkes-Barre VA Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Program Earns National Accreditation

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center is proud to announce that our Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery program has earned accreditation from the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program (MBSAQIP).

This accreditation ensures that our medical doctors are dedicated to improving the health of our Veterans by performing safe, high-quality, and successful surgical procedures. Our surgeons often adopt new forms of technologies and procedures into their practice, which leads to continued post-op success for Veterans.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center is the only federal facility nationally, including Department of Defense facilities, to hold any form of MBSAQIP accreditation. The WBVAMC has maintained the highest standards in surgical care that the healthcare industry requires.

The Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Program provides patient-centered health care for our Veterans while offering a multidisciplinary team approach that includes physicians, advanced level providers, nursing staff, psychologist, dietitian, and physical and occupational therapists. This has allowed the program to align with VA's vision to provide Veterans with the world-class benefits and services they have earned.

Dr. Chaudry, Chief of Surgery and Director of the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Program at the Wilkes-Barre VA, is committed to

adhering to the highest standards of compassion, commitment, excellence, professionalism, integrity, accountability, and stewardship.

"Earning the accreditation for the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Program highlights the excellence of our program as well as the commitment the entire team has to provide our Veterans with the highest level of health care."

—Lynn Eckrote, Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Coordinator

The success and expertise of the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Program at the Wilkes-Barre VA has allowed our team to collaborate on various bariatric cases at other VA facilities within our VISN.

"I would like to recognize Dr. Chaudry and the rest of his bariatric team on earning the MBSAQIP Accreditation. The program's full team approach along with the Wilkes-Barre VA's skilled surgical Doctors have made our facility the place to go for the highest level of Veteran Bariatric care. Congratulations on this distinguished honor."

—Mr. Russell Lloyd – Director, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

For more information about the Wilkes-Barre VA's Bariatric program, please contact the medical center at 570-824-3521, ext. 27111.





EIGHT CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

1111 East End Blvd., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
570-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic

3110 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

225 Columbia Mall Drive, Bloomsburg, PA 17815
570-316-4116

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

701 Slate Belt Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1537 Elmira Street, Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Tobyhanna Army Depot, Bldg. 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

600 Maple Avenue, Honesdale, PA 18431
570-251-6543

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1705 Warren Avenue, 3rd Fl., Ste. 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791

Local VA Creative Art Competition

MORE THAN JUST WINNING

The VA National Creative Arts Competition is much more than an event to recognize who is the best of the best. The competition can be a healing place where Veterans interact and empathize with other Veterans. Each Veteran has their own unique story and may need to cope with physical and emotional disabilities. Working to create something great is a form of therapy that can go a long way in the healing process.

Each year, Veterans treated at VA medical centers can compete in the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival, which recognizes the progress and recovery made through arts therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's Veterans.

This is the fourteenth year that the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has taken part in

the National Creative Arts Competition. The competition itself is part of a nationwide effort to showcase the creative endeavors of Veterans in more than 150 categories in five divisions, which include art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music.

This year, the Wilkes-Barre VA's Recreation Therapy program decided to focus on the Art and Creative Writing divisions only. There were 19 local Veterans who participated in this year's competition. All first, second, and third place winners will have their submission entered into the national competition where the national winners will be announced in January 2023. The creative works of our local Veterans are currently on display next to the information desk on the ground floor of the Medical Center.

Call Center

1-877-928-2621

CONNECT WITH US



ONLINE
wilkes-barre.va.gov



FACEBOOK
facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre