

Your Neighbors in Health

MedStar Montgomery Medical Center

Regaining Her Stride: An 85-Year-Old's Journey Back To Independence.



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A year of progress **rooted in community.**



At MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, our story has always been connected to the story of the Olney community. We are introducing a new name for our community newsletter, *Your Neighbors in Health*, to continue to share and reflect on the close-knit, local spirit that has guided our hospital for more than a century. It's a reminder that the care we provide remains personal, familiar, and rooted in the neighborhoods we share.

We've celebrated milestones together, met challenges together, and cared for one another through every season. As we continue further into the year, I'm reminded how much of our progress is driven not only by our clinical teams, but by the people we serve—you, your families—and your generosity.

That shared spirit is especially visible in the transformation of the Howard R. Gudelsky Emergency Department. For decades, our ER has been the front door to care for thousands of our neighbors each year. Even as our teams continued delivering exceptional care, the physical space no longer accommodated the needs of a growing, aging community.

Thanks to our community support, that is changing. The renovations underway put patient-centered design at the forefront. We're creating a calmer, easier-to-navigate environment, with purpose-built spaces to support a wide range of needs and strengthen the ER experience for patients and families. And because this work is moving forward in phases, the ER remains fully open and ready to care for patients every day.

That same commitment to our neighbors comes through in another accomplishment we're proud to share. Our team at MedStar Montgomery has now earned the American College of Emergency Physicians' Level 3 Geriatric Emergency Department recognition—a national recognition that affirms our ER meets the highest standards for geriatric-focused care. This accreditation didn't happen overnight; it represents years of thoughtful work by nurses, physicians, and leaders dedicated to making sure older adults receive individualized care.

As you read through this issue, you'll see that same spirit woven through every story, whether it's our gastroenterology specialists helping patients find clarity when symptoms arise, our orthopaedic and vascular teams restoring mobility and independence, or the neighbors who volunteer in our ER to ensure no patient feels alone. These are threads of one larger narrative: a community of people caring for one another.

We are grateful to have you on this journey with us. Your trust, your involvement, and your belief in our mission continue to move us forward—one renovation, one accreditation, and one patient at a time. As we open this new chapter under the banner of *Your Neighbors in Health*, I hope you feel the same sense of connection and shared purpose that inspires us every day.

Wishing you good health,

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Your Neighbors in Health

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Serving our community through access to exceptional care and the latest medical advancements.

A new way to start the conversation about digestive health.

Our GI Connected Care program connects patients to expert gastroenterology care for a wide range of digestive health concerns.



Digestive symptoms are common, often unpredictable, and rarely convenient. A change in how your stomach feels, a shift in bowel habits, or an unexplained sense that something “just isn’t right” can raise understandable questions. For many people, the hardest part is knowing where to begin. As gastroenterologist Samer Charbel, MD, explains, “Patients don’t always need an immediate procedure, but they do

need a place to start, somewhere they can talk through symptoms before they become more concerning. This timely evaluation allows us to investigate the patient’s symptoms and obtain answers within a short period of time.”

Our GI Connected Care program offers a thoughtful starting point: a virtual appointment with a GI specialist who can help you make sense of your symptoms and guide your next steps.

Understanding your symptoms in context

Many digestive issues share similar features, which can make them difficult to interpret without clinical input. GI Connected Care helps you understand symptoms within the context of digestive health. During a virtual visit, the clinician listens to how your symptoms began, how they have changed, and what makes them better or worse. This discussion helps determine whether your experience is likely related to diet, medications, stress, or a pattern that calls for testing. Rather than focusing on isolated symptoms, the goal is to understand how they fit together so you receive the right level of care at the right time.

Knowing when targeted evaluation is the next step

Some situations call for more specific guidance, like changes in stool appearance, swallowing difficulties, or a test result that suggests something may be abnormal and needs further medical evaluation.

“Having a clear place to start is incredibly valuable for patients who aren’t sure what their digestive symptoms



mean,” says Mildred Myrttil, DNP, FNP-BC, a nurse practitioner with the GI Connected Care team. “A virtual visit helps them triage what they’re experiencing and make the best decisions for their care, especially in settings where access may be limited.”

The clinician helps you understand what a particular symptom might indicate, and which diagnostic steps would provide the clearest answers. This avoids uncertainty and ensures that the next step—whether imaging, labs, or a procedure—is appropriate and well-informed.

Supporting ongoing digestive health needs

For patients living with chronic digestive conditions, GI Connected Care offers a practical way to begin and maintain important steps in long-term care. Virtual visits can help with that initial consultation with a provider, lifestyle guidance, and pre-procedure discussions—especially on days when symptoms make travel to the office difficult. This format helps initiate evaluation so you can transition smoothly to a GI provider close to home for continued management.

When you’re ready to talk, we’re here.

GI Connected Care is one more way we support digestive wellness in our community: a simple, steady first step for anyone who wants to understand their symptoms with greater clarity and move toward the right care, at the right time. As Dr. Charbel puts it, “Our goal is to meet patients where they are and help them move forward with confidence, one conversation at a time.”

Our GI Connected Care program offers timely virtual GI care, without the long wait. To schedule an appointment, call **202-912-1300** or visit **MedStarHealth.org/GIConnectedCare** to learn more.

How community generosity is transforming emergency care.

When the unexpected happens—chest pain, a fall, a medical scare in the middle of the night—we rush to the emergency department, trusting that expert care will be there the moment we need it.

For more than 100 years, our team at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center has been that lifeline for our community: caring for neighbors, welcoming new generations, and delivering lifesaving care with skill and compassion. Through every decade of change, one thing has remained constant: our promise to be here for you when it matters most.

Today, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of our community—we are embarking on one of the most significant enhancements in our hospital's recent history: a transformed Howard R. Gudelsky Emergency Department (ER) that ensures our promise grows stronger than ever as we advance emergency care for the next century.

As Emily Briton, president of MedStar Montgomery, shares, “Our ER is where critical moments begin. We’re strengthening it so every patient, whether a child, an older adult, someone experiencing a behavioral health crisis, or someone with a minor injury, receives timely, high-quality care in a space designed for their needs. This renovation is intentional. It’s about safety, efficiency, and the patient experience, and it reflects our commitment to be there when our community needs us most.”

Meeting the needs of a changing community

Even as patient visits have grown significantly over the years, our clinical teams have continued to deliver



A view of the planned entry area, designed to support patient comfort and safe, efficient care.



outstanding care within an aging footprint. Their dedication has recently earned national recognition from the American College of Emergency Physicians as a Level 3 Geriatric ER, a distinction that reinforces what our community already knows: patients of all ages, including older adults, receive exceptional, attentive care at MedStar Montgomery.

Our last ER renovation was more than 15 years ago, and while our providers' commitment has never wavered, we now have an exciting opportunity to build on that strong foundation. Updating the ER allows us to carry forward everything that works so well today while also creating a modern environment that will support exceptional care for the next century.

A patient-centered design

Our ER cares for everyone, from children to seniors, and the renovation reflects that reality. The updated space includes thoughtful features that make it easier, especially for older patients, to find your way, move safely, and feel more at ease. Clearer signage, contrasting colors, oversized clocks, and supportive handrails align with national standards for elder-friendly emergency care and reinforce our ongoing commitment to seniors.

Phase 1 of the renovation has already delivered important improvements, including a fully secured behavioral health area with private rooms, along with updated treatment spaces designed to support a wide range of patient needs. As the renovation continues, future phases will add more flexible rooms and care areas that can be used in different ways depending on what patients need that day, helping our team provide the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

We already use telehealth during triage to help begin care sooner, and the new design enhances that process. A more efficient layout will help patients move more smoothly from tele-triage to the next steps of evaluation and testing, so care can start quickly and seamlessly.

Because the patient experience is more than clinical care, the renovation also includes calmer lighting, supportive furnishings, and softer finishes that help reduce stress for patients and families. A more thoughtfully designed waiting area also offers a more

Please visit [MedStarHealth.org/DonateED](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/DonateED) to learn more or make a gift.

comfortable place to gather during what can often be challenging moments.

Creating flexible spaces for today and tomorrow

The redesigned space will allow for better visibility and quicker response times. New clinical workstations will give our providers dedicated areas to collaborate, document, and access information efficiently. Every detail, from technology to layout, has been shaped through deep collaboration among clinical, operational, and design teams. The goal is to build a modern emergency department grounded in humanity, rooted in our mission, and ready for the next 100 years of care.

“We’re building the hospital of the future,” says Briton. “One that’s modern, responsive, and rooted in what our patients truly need, today and tomorrow.” This transformation is possible because our community believes in being there for one another. Philanthropic support is the driving force behind the ER renovation, allowing this vital work to move forward in phases while keeping the ER fully open and ready to care for patients.

By investing in this project, donors are shaping the front door of our hospital, creating a safer, more welcoming, and more patient-centered environment for people when they need us most. We invite the community to be part of this vital effort and help bring the next phase of the ER renovation to life.



David Zaika, volunteer, in front of the emergency department that holds deep meaning for his family.

One donor's commitment to the future of our emergency department.

For David Zaika, the emergency department at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center holds a deep and personal meaning that has grown over time. He began volunteering nearly 20 years ago, when his children were grown and he was looking for a meaningful way to give back.

In recent years, as his late wife faced chronic illness and frequent emergency visits, David saw the department from a different perspective. The compassionate care she received—and the hospice support ultimately arranged for her on site—left a lasting impact on his family. “During my wife’s illness, we saw the ER from the other side,” he says. “The compassion we received meant everything.” Today, David continues to honor that experience through his philanthropy. His generosity reflects the impact donors can make in strengthening the emergency department for the next generation of patients and families.

With the upcoming renovation of the Howard R. Gudelsky Emergency Department, David is proud to support a project that will create a more modern, patient-centered environment. Donors like David help transform emergency care—funding improvements that enhance safety, comfort, and dignity for every patient who enters our doors. Their commitment ensures that our team at MedStar Montgomery can continue providing exceptional care in a space designed for the future.



The envisioned waiting area features a more comfortable, easy-to-navigate space for patients and families.

Regaining her stride: An 85-year-old's journey back to independence.

At 85, Helen Andrews has always lived independently. She handled her errands, drove herself everywhere, and managed her days with ease.

That changed last spring, when a decline in mobility left her relying on a cane and unable to get into her car without assistance. Her symptoms began subtly, but by April, she struggled to walk, becoming largely homebound and depending on her brother for groceries and transportation.



By June, she found herself in the office of Katharine Harper, MD, a board certified, fellowship-trained orthopaedic surgeon who specializes in joint replacements of the hip and knee. Imaging of Helen's right hip confirmed advanced arthritis, which had progressed to a fracture.

"I couldn't walk. I've been independent all my life, but this put me out of business," Helen recalls.

Helen prepared for her hip replacement procedure, which was scheduled for July 24. The month leading up to it was emotionally difficult for many reasons. Her older sister fell ill and passed away on July 23, the day before Helen's surgery, though her family did not share the sad news until after her hip replacement.

On the day of Helen's surgery, one of our chaplains met her at the door and stayed with her in the waiting room. "She helped me so much. Everyone I met throughout the process was just wonderful," says Helen.

Hip replacement is one of the most common surgeries in medicine, with pain relief being the primary reason people seek the surgery. Dr. Harper explained, "If you're having joint pain most days, if it's interfering with everyday activities, and if you've tried non-surgical options—physical therapy, activity modifications, acetaminophen or anti-inflammatories, or steroid injections—and they're no longer providing adequate relief, that's when replacement surgery becomes the best option."

Helen's surgery went smoothly. "My surgery was on a Thursday, and I went to my sister's funeral on Monday. I had to go. And I was able to walk down that aisle," she recalls with emotion.

Dr. Harper credits our Rapid Recovery program at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center for improving outcomes and giving patients confidence. With it, patients get a single point of contact who helps them



After hip replacement, Helen Andrews returned to the simple joys of independence, including time in her garden.

progress through the entire joint replacement process, from presurgical education to physical therapy and everything in between. It's a one-stop shop for patient-centered, inclusive care, and it makes handling all the details so much easier.

After the surgery, Helen took six weeks to recover at her brother's home. She continues to faithfully follow her physical therapist's orders, regularly doing her prescribed exercises.

Today, Helen is back to living the independent life she loves, with gratitude to the exceptional team at MedStar Montgomery.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Ortho](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Ortho) for more information. To make an appointment with Dr. Harper, call **301-774-8958**.

How to stay a step ahead of peripheral artery disease.

For many people over the age of 50, leg pain or fatigue can feel like a normal part of getting older. But sometimes those small signals are early signs of peripheral artery disease (PAD), a condition that limits blood flow, most often to the legs.



“PAD develops when plaque builds up inside the arteries, narrowing the pathways that carry oxygen-rich blood through the body,” explains Danielle Salazar, MD, a vascular surgeon at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center. “When that circulation slows, it can cause pain or cramping while walking, discoloration in a limb, or wounds that heal slowly. Left untreated, PAD can lead to serious complications, including amputation.”

Because PAD often progresses silently—with as many as 65% of affected patients showing no symptoms—routine checkups and increased awareness are essential.

Unequal risks, uneven outcomes

Not everyone experiences PAD the same way. Studies show that women are 30% more likely than men to develop the disease and are often diagnosed later, when it's more advanced.

Racial differences are striking as well. Thirty percent of Black men and 27% of Black women will develop PAD during their lifetime, compared with 22% of

Hispanic adults and 19% of White adults. These disparities underscore why MedStar Health is focused on identifying PAD early among higher-risk populations: so that our physicians can intervene sooner, preserve mobility, and prevent avoidable limb loss.

Care that considers every story

“Our work begins with listening,” says Dr. Salazar. “As vascular disease is a long-term relationship, I want patients and referring physicians to feel like they can easily speak with me regarding vascular concerns.”

Every patient brings their own set of circumstances, concerns, and goals to treatment. MedStar Health's specialists in podiatry, vascular surgery, plastic surgery, and orthopaedics work side by side to protect limbs and restore mobility. With recent advances in limb salvage, we have ever more techniques and procedures to decrease the risk of amputation.

For some people, that plan might focus on lifestyle changes like eating healthier, quitting smoking, or joining a supervised exercise program to improve circulation. For others, medications may help manage cholesterol, blood pressure, or diabetes. And when necessary, minimally invasive or surgical procedures can restore blood flow and prevent amputation.

When we combine medical expertise with compassion and understanding, we give every patient a stronger chance at healing.

Small signs, big impact

The most powerful thing a patient can do is speak up early. A sore that won't heal, a change in skin color, or a sense of heaviness or fatigue in one leg might seem minor, but it's worth mentioning.

“We want patients to bring up anything that feels different,” says Dr. Salazar. “The sooner we know, the sooner we can act, and that can make all the difference.”

Early detection and steady partnership between patients and providers can protect circulation, prevent complications, and keep life moving forward. When we catch PAD early, we don't just save limbs: we help people stay active, independent, and in motion.



Talk with your primary care provider about seeing a vascular specialist for prevention, screening, and treatment options, or visit [MedStarHealth.org/PADAction](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/PADAction) for more information.



Meet our **new providers.**



Derek Bui, DO
Physiatry and Pain Medicine
P 301-570-7415



Marc Kozam, MD
Gastroenterology
P 301-774-4400

Know where to go this cold and flu season.

With the right care at the right time, you can move through the winter season feeling supported and more in control of your respiratory health.



MedStar eVisit - Telehealth
MedStar eVisit offers 24/7 virtual urgent care and is a good place to start off-hours or if you cannot get in to see your primary care provider. Our providers virtually evaluate non-urgent symptoms and conditions.



MedStar Health Urgent Care
MedStar Health Urgent Care locations offer a more thorough in-person evaluation for non-urgent symptoms.



Emergency department
The ER offers care when symptoms become severe, sudden, or life-threatening.



Minhal Makshood, MD
Cardiology
P 301-570-7404



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P 301-774-8958



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