

## RUMC Helps 98-Year-Old West Brighton Resident Takes First Step Toward COVID-19 Vaccination

On January 14, Mary Cochran of West Brighton received her first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, taking one step closer to immunization. The nonagenarian was accompanied to Richmond University Medical Center by her daughter, Helen Calcagno.

“I want to be healthy,” Cochran said about why she chose to be vaccinated. “I want to see my grandchildren and great-grandchildren.”

Following guidelines from the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH), RUMC began administering first round COVID-19 vaccinations in mid-January to those individuals classified by NYS DOH as Group 1B. Group 1B includes people age 65 and older, teachers, public-facing grocery workers, education workers, first responders, police and fire personnel, court officers, corrections officers, public safety, and transit workers.

Cochran will celebrate her 99th birthday in May of this year. She is a military wife; her late husband, Francis, was a United States Marine for over 30 years and fought in both World War II and the Korean War. Originally from Brooklyn, she has three children, Helen, John, and Maureen, seven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. Her eighth great-grandchild, Michael, was born two weeks before she received her vaccination.

Since mid-December, RUMC has continued the successful vaccination process of employees, medical staff, and practitioners classified by NYS DOH as Group 1A. This first group includes all high risk hospital workers, such as physicians, registered nurses, EMS, individuals administering vaccinations, staff with direct patient contact, and outpatient and ambulatory workers who provide direct in-person patient care, among others. Last month, Governor Andrew Cuomo praised RUMC for being one of only a handful of hospitals in all of New York State, at that time, to have administered 100 percent of its initial vaccine allocation.

“I am very happy to see that many people are getting vaccinated against COVID-19,” RUMC’s vice chair of Medicine, program director, Internal Medicine, and chief of Critical Care, Jay Nfonoyim, MD, said. “I have received both doses. For me and for most people the decision

to be vaccinated was easy because it was not vaccine vs. no vaccine. It was contracting COVID-19 vs. vaccine.” Dr. Nfonoyim received his first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on December 15 and his second dose on January 4.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and based on evidence from clinical trials, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 95 percent effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 illness in people without evidence of previous infection seven days after the second dose.

Since last spring when the COVID-19 pandemic began, RUMC has treated and discharged over 2,400 people affected by the virus, and continues to provide long-term and short-term treatment to recovered individuals through its comprehensive Post COVID-19 Care Center.



(left to right): RUMC Chief Operating Officer and Chief Nurse Officer Rosemarie Stazzone, Mary Cochran, and her daughter Helen Calcagno.

## Message From the President & CEO, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE



In recent weeks, our independent hospital has been a role model for New York State. Don't take my word for it, just listen to Governor Andrew Cuomo. As our state continues the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations to more and more groups of people, our hospital continues to lead the way, administering all of our allocations from the New York State Department of Health as they are received.

Last month, RUMC was one of only a handful of hospitals across the state to have successfully administered 100 percent of their initial vaccine allocations. This achievement was praised by Gov. Cuomo and placed our hospital among many of the larger healthcare systems. We continue to be in this elite group of hospitals, weeks into the process, continuing to administer our vaccine allocations in a very timely, efficient manner. I want to congratulate everyone

involved in developing our vaccination program, which was no easy feat. Thanks to all of you for this tremendous milestone, which moves our entire community closer to the ending of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We continue to prioritize vaccination of individuals in Group 1A, which includes all high risk hospital workers, such as physicians, registered nurses, EMS, individuals administering vaccinations, staff with direct patient contact, and outpatient and ambulatory workers who provide direct in-person patient care, among others.

As we continue to progress through Group 1A, as our cover story highlights, among the many members of our community recently vaccinated as part of the state's Group 1B was 98-year-old Mary Cochran. Group 1B includes people age 65 and older, teachers, education workers, first responders, police and fire personnel, court officers, corrections officers, public safety and transit workers.

I cannot adequately express the gratitude being extended by those in our community

coming to our hospital to receive their vaccinations. Words and phrases like "patient, kind, and compassionate," "wonderful," "truly patient-centric," and "thank you" have been spoken over and over, in words, texts, emails, and letters. What this shows is that the actions of our hospital to help end this pandemic will leave a lasting legacy on our community for generations to come. Thank you for your continued dedication and compassion in the face of tremendous challenges and uncertainty. We are nearing the light at the end of this tunnel because of you and soon this light will shine on some wonderful hospital projects that will unfold.

**Remember the Power of One —  
You Make A Difference!**

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE  
President and Chief Executive Officer

## Patient Satisfaction: A Note of Thanks

Today was probably one of the happiest days of my life! My 95-year-old mom after six weeks in the hospital with COVID-19 and bilateral pneumonia was discharged from the hospital. She is safe and sound, thank God. My mom is home by the grace of God and the miracle workers at Richmond University Medical Center. THANK YOU RUMC!

Sincerely,

**I.A.**

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Just wanted to let you know that I came into the hospital for pre-admission testing yesterday, and everyone couldn't have been kinder and more professional! I was very nervous to be there because of COVID-19 concerns, but your staff did everything they could to put me at ease. It certainly can't be easy for them to work under the current conditions, but they all are rising to the occasion.

Thanks,

**A.C.**

To Diane, Denise, and My Incredible Care Team at RUMC Labor and Delivery,

How do I begin to thank all of you for the incredible care you all provided to us? Our son is beautiful and so healthy. I felt safe and heard during his birth.

Diane, I will never forget you. You are an incredible nurse and I am so grateful for you. My labor was hard, but your care made an impact. When you said, "I'm not leaving you until your pain is under control," I felt so much better and when I was being taken back for my C-section, you were there!!

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Sincerely,

**P. & F. P.**



## Richmond University Medical Center Begins Administering COVID-19 Booster Shots

Healthcare workers at Richmond University Medical Center began receiving their second round of COVID-19 vaccinations on January 4. This second “booster” shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine completed the vaccination process for these individuals, many of whom are medical personnel directly treating COVID-19 patients.

Following guidance from the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH), RUMC began administering the first round of vaccinations back on December 15. As of early January, RUMC was one of only a handful of hospitals in New York State to have successfully administered 100 percent of its initial vaccine allocation from New York State. In early January, RUMC also received a second allocation of the Pfizer vaccine and its first shipment of the Moderna vaccine, enabling the hospital to continue aggressively providing first round doses and booster shots to those individuals eligible for vaccination according to NYS DOH guidelines.

“We’re very excited about the fact that the push we’ve been putting on to vaccinate our team has really been bearing some

great results,” president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. “We know that this is the main weapon to fight this virus.”

Among those to first receive their booster shot was Jay Nfonoyim, MD. Dr. Nfonoyim is RUMC’s vice chair of Medicine, program director, Internal Medicine, and chief of Critical Care. Dr. Nfonoyim was the first staff person at RUMC to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on December 15. He has been directly treating numerous COVID-19 patients throughout the pandemic.

“This is something we can add to our war chest,” Dr. Nfonoyim said of the vaccine. “We had masks, we had social distancing, we didn’t have vaccines — so now we have a vaccine. It’s a big thing.”

Also among the first group to receive their booster shots was RUMC paramedic Jeff Brown. A paramedic at RUMC for over 20 years, Brown was sick in April after he contracted the COVID-19 virus. “The reason I’m getting it is that I trust this 100 percent,” Brown said. “I don’t want to get it again. I don’t want to bring it to my wife and my grandkids.”



*RUMC Paramedic Jeff Brown received his COVID-19 booster shot on January 4, three weeks after his first dose administered on December 15, 2020.*



*Jay Nfonoyim, MD, receives his COVID-19 booster shot, completing his vaccination process.*

# Richmond University Medical Center Welcomes Its First Baby of 2021



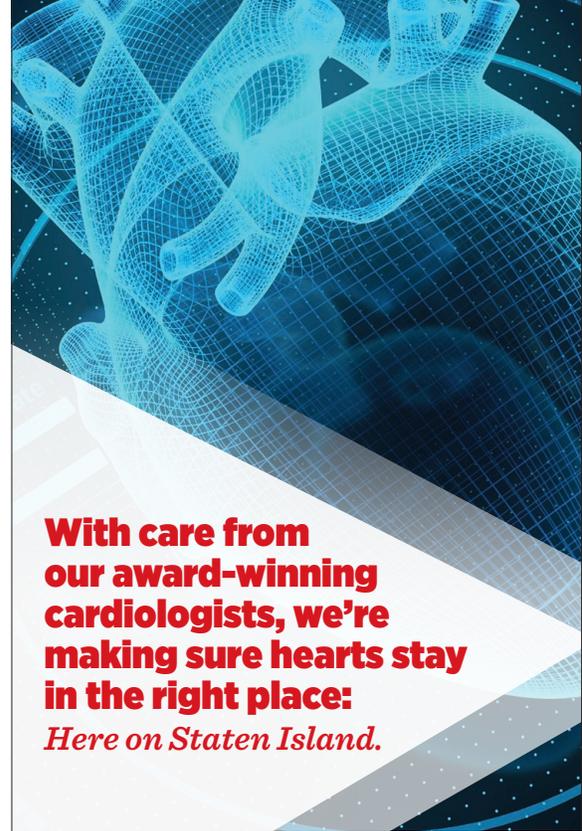
Proud parents Kristina Montalvo and Hector Villarreal of New Springville with new daughter Mariana Iris Liagya-Villarreal.

At 11:58 a.m. on New Year's Day, Mariana Iris Liagya-Villarreal became the first baby born in 2021 at Richmond University Medical Center. Mariana weighed in at 6 pounds, 5 ounces, measured 19 and half inches, and is the first child born to proud parents Kristina Montalvo and Hector Villarreal of New Springville.

Mariana's actual due date was January 9, providing her new parents with a wonderful New Year's Day surprise. "It still doesn't feel real," said new mom Kristina, who added that she, Mariana, and Hector are all doing well, and looking forward to starting the new year off as a family.

Close to 3,000 babies are welcomed into the world each year, on average, at Richmond University Medical Center. RUMC is also Staten Island's only "Baby-Friendly" hospital, a designation awarded by the United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). This highly prestigious designation is in recognition of the hospital's continuous practice of promoting and supporting the importance of breastfeeding. This designation also makes Richmond University Medical Center one of only 22 "Baby Friendly" hospitals in New York City, and one of only 36 hospitals in New York State.

There are also approximately 600 annual admissions to RUMC's highly acclaimed Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). RUMC's NICU has one of the highest survival rates in the country, 997 out of every 1,000 births. The hospital's board certified, experienced medical team has treated babies weighing as little as one and half pounds who go on to live healthy, productive lives thanks to the advanced, compassionate care they received at birth.



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## WHO WE ARE

**Francesco Rotatori, MD, FACC**  
Chair, Department of Cardiology  
Board certified in internal medicine, cardiovascular disease and interventional cardiology, echocardiography, and nuclear cardiology.

**Sean Galligan, MD, FACC**  
Board certified in internal medicine, cardiovascular disease, and interventional cardiology. Registered in vascular interpretation.

**Fiona Shehaj, MD**  
Board certified in internal medicine and completed her fellowship in cardiovascular disease. Specializing in woman's heart health.

February is Heart Health Month

**Richmond University Medical Center**

**Cardiology**

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RUMCSI.ORG/CARDIOLOGY





*Daniele J. Kouroupos, PA-C, senior physician assistant in ENT, NCCPA board certified, and Christopher V. Lisi, MD, chief, division of ENT (Otolaryngology) Head & Neck Surgery*

## Board Certified ENT Expert Discusses Common Pediatric Conditions and Treatments

February is Kids ENT Health Month and while the cold weather brings fun traditions like ice skating and hot chocolate, it is also the time when a variety of ear, nose, and throat ailments are more likely to arise in children.

“Here in the northeast, colds, flu, and respiratory viruses are most prevalent during the winter and can predispose children to respiratory infections that enlarge the tonsils and adenoids, creating nasal congestion and subsequent breathing problems,” said Christopher Lisi, MD, chief of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. “We definitely see a rising incidence of these conditions between October and March, all exacerbated by the heat being run in homes and other indoor locations, which can further dry out nasal passages.”

### Pediatric ENT Conditions and Treatments

To help parents, Dr. Lisi discussed common conditions affecting kids and how they can be effectively treated:

- **Conditions of the Tonsils/Adenoids:** While the tonsils and adenoids are tissues in the back of nose and throat that support the immune system by producing white blood cells to fight infection, “other organs of the body produce white blood cells too, so it’s typically not harmful to the immune system to remove the tonsils and/or adenoids if they become problematic and begin to cause, rather than prevent, disease,” Dr. Lisi said. “If the tonsils and adenoids become persistently inflamed and enlarged, they can cause nasal obstruction, heavy snoring, and sleep apnea (which can lead the child to temporarily stop breathing during the night). The level of obstruction

caused by the tonsils and/or adenoids—which can cause reduced oxygen levels and potentially lead to developmental problems similar to ADHD—can be diagnosed with a sleep study and can be completely remedied or alleviated with removal,” he said.

- **Ear Infections:** In the case of ear infections, “fluid builds up behind the eardrum and can cause pain, muffled hearing, and fever in children,” Dr. Lisi said. “A bulging red eardrum is a typical sign of this condition and can be very painful and cause the eardrum to rupture.” While antibiotics are generally the treatment, children who suffer from persistent ear infections that require continual doses of antibiotics might be candidates for ear tubes. Through this procedure, “we create a small hole in the eardrum and insert a plastic tube in it so that fluids drain rather than building up and impairing a child’s hearing, which can lead to learning difficulties and delayed speech if left untreated,” Dr. Lisi said. “The placement of ear tubes is a minor procedure done under sedation and, thanks to recent advancements in the devices, can even be done right in the office for kids who are old enough and cooperative enough to tolerate it.” Dr. Lisi noted that ear tubes typically fall out on their own within a year or so and that most children will not require a second set because the condition will have been mitigated.

- **Nasal Allergies:** “Allergies like hay fever and their fallout — e.g., a runny nose, itchy eyes and nose, and sneezing — are extremely common among kids, particularly during the spring, fall, and summertime, and

approximately 20 to 30 percent of the population suffers from nasal allergies and resultant nasal disorders, snoring, or blockage,” Dr. Lisi confirmed. He said that these conditions can be alleviated by employing everything from allergy avoidance to allergy nasal sprays and antihistamines. “Allergy avoidance can involve the use of an allergy cover on the child’s pillow or mattress, placement of an air purifier in their bedroom to suck in allergens, and refraining from letting a pet lay on their bed if the child is allergic to that animal,” he said. “In addition, dust mites live in sheets and pillows, so we recommend that this bedding be washed every two weeks (or more frequently) in hot water.”

Used on a temporary basis and with oversight by a pediatrician or an ENT, a range of popular over-the-counter or prescription nasal steroid sprays can be very effective in controlling the congestion and other symptoms caused by nasal allergies, as can the use of antihistamines, which help tamp down the body’s natural release of the chemical ‘histamine’ in response to allergens.

“Overall, it’s not normal if your child isn’t breathing well, is snoring at night, or is dealing with other issues related to the ear, nose, and throat; these conditions could have long-term effects on kids and they should definitely be evaluated by a pediatrician or an ENT specialist,” Dr. Lisi confirmed. “The good news is that there are many highly effective treatments out there and our team at Richmond University Medical Center’s Center for Advanced ENT, Sinus and Voice Care is here to help.”

## Amidst the Pandemic, RUMC Continues Critical Emergency Medical Services for the Public



*Johnathon LeBaron, DO, FACEP, chair for the Department of Emergency Medicine.*

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Americans made more than 136 million visits to emergency rooms nationwide in 2019 for treatment of everything from bee stings and stomach pains to strokes, trauma, and more. Offering quick access for patients and staffed by a team of medical professionals experienced in administering urgent care, Emergency Departments (EDs) are critical to the management of acute illness and injury.

“Our well-staffed and equipped Emergency Department acts as a safety net for society,” confirmed Johnathon LeBaron, DO, FACEP, chair for the Department of Emergency Medicine. Among other specialties, “we offer outstanding stroke care services and are a thrombectomy-capable facility (which involves a highly specialized surgical team). We provide patients access to our catheterization lab within 60 minutes to treat heart attacks, and are also an American College of Surgeons (ACS)-accredited Level 1 Adult Trauma Center, which requires team members to have precise specializations or certifications.”

“On the pediatric side, we’re an ACS-accredited Level 2 Pediatric Trauma Center with specialists trained in everything from pediatric orthopedics, cardiology, and general surgery. We also have a first-rate pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) capable of providing the highest level of care and specialty services,” Dr. LeBaron said. “Our Emergency Department is additionally

equipped to treat patients with substance/alcohol use disorder and/or psychiatric issues, and we operate a unique ‘Peer Advocacy Program,’ through which we pair up patients with those in recovery to provide peer counseling and beneficial one-on-one support.”

**“It’s exciting and humbling to witness the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine, which could hopefully be the measure that ends this pandemic.”**

As a key site for the treatment of COVID-19, Dr. LeBaron said that a number of measures undertaken in the Emergency Department, and throughout the hospital, have improved patient outcomes since the virus first bore down on New York City in spring of 2020.

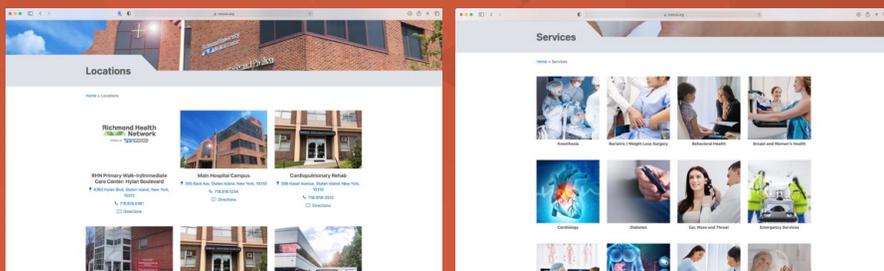
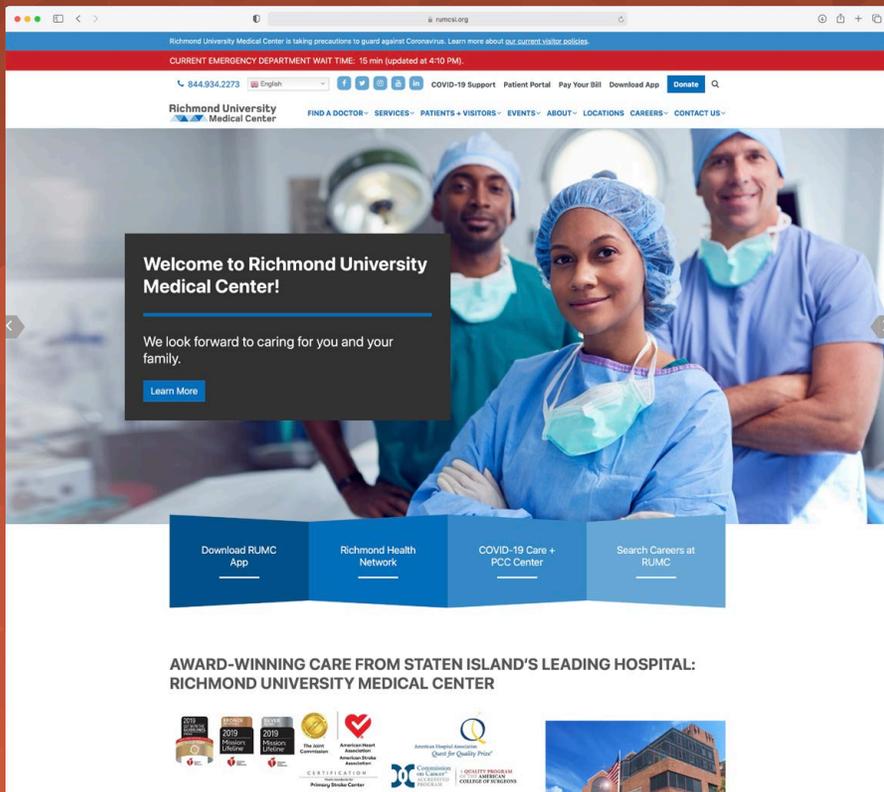
“Thanks to vigilance when it comes to wearing masks, social distancing, hand-washing, and other proven safety protocols, we’ve made the treatment of COVID-19 much more manageable,” he said. “In addition, through a growing body of medications and therapies to treat patients with COVID-19 – including our recent ability to administer monoclonal antibodies, which bind to COVID-19 particles and help prevent an overly extreme immune response by the body—we’re increasingly able to prevent COVID-19 from progressing to advanced stages, particularly within high-risk patients in early phases of the disease.”

A range of other safety measures has also been implemented in the Emergency Department to enhance the safety of patients and staff members alike. Among them, “we’ve eliminated our waiting room and minimized wait times, patients suspected of having COVID-19 are isolated in special areas, and our hospital has an ample supply of PPE so that patients can be safely treated,” he said. “Everyone admitted to the hospital is tested for COVID-19 as well as for flu and other common rhinoviruses and in mid-December we began vaccinating employees, with the hospital’s Emergency Department and ICU workers receiving the first doses based on their heightened risk.”

According to Dr. LeBaron, “it’s exciting and humbling to witness the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine, which could hopefully be the measure that ends this pandemic. It’s highly effective and has brought a lot of optimism to patients, staff members, and the entire community.”

“The professionals who work at Richmond University Medical Center and within our Emergency Department are incredible; many are from the community themselves and walk to work each day,” Dr. LeBaron said. “This is their hospital and they want it to succeed and see their community members do well. We’re proud to offer an extremely safe environment, an outstanding level of care, and resources you’d get access to at health systems in Manhattan, while still maintaining a local, community feel.”

## RUMC Website Gets an Upgrade



A new year, a new look. Richmond University Medical Center's website, RUMCSI.org, has a new, modern look and feel, making it easier for the public to search and find service lines, ambulatory sites, and individual physicians.

Aside from the new look, the website has several new features, including patient testimonials, information specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, and updated service lines. The current ED wait time is now also posted on the home page, and the entire patient guide, provided at admission, is now available for download or can be viewed right from the website. The physicians' directory, news section, health library, and calendar of events are also now more easily accessible.

"Having a modern-looking website that is easy to navigate is critical for any business or institution, especially a hospital like RUMC," vice president for Public Relations and Marketing, Alex Lutz, said. "A website is probably the most important marketing tool we can have. Our ads, print and digital, as well as service line brochures, all direct people to our website for more information. It's critical that when someone arrives at our site, they not only find what they are looking for right away, but that the style of the site also captures RUMC's reputation as Staten Island's source for the most advanced healthcare modern medicine has to offer."

## New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Kennedy Akpoh, *Food Service Worker*  
Cindy Cibbarelli, *Administrative Assistant*  
Adivie Dema, *Building Service Worker*  
Frank DeVito, *RN*  
Brianna DiCaprio, *RN*  
Natalya Dorum, *RN*  
Kerry Egan, *RN*  
Kassim Jabateh, *Security Guard*  
Genna Kavcic, *Registrar*  
Dyan Landman, *Recreation Therapist*  
Jeremey Lin, *Clinical Lab Tech*  
Delakshi Liyanagamage, *LMSW*  
Kevin Lynch, *Security Guard*

Tariq Martin, *Registrar*  
Ag Melniker, *Respiratory Therapist*  
Violetta Mikaelian, *RN*  
TinaMarie Millare, *LMSW*  
Nataliya Nabutovskaya, *RN*  
Joan Nelson, *Director*  
Helene Piarulli, *Assistant Director*  
Tatianna Quinones, *Building Service Worker*  
Philomon Samuel, *Respiratory Therapist*  
Magret Savage, *Respiratory Therapist*  
Nikhil Sirga, *Clinical Research Fellow*  
Konstantin Vaizman, *Physician*

## Praise for Our COVID-19 Vaccination Program

I just wanted to say how wonderful everyone was at the COVID-19 vaccine center. The men working security were patient, kind and compassionate. The medical staff were professional and excellent! Thank you so much for taking care of me, my 74-year-old husband and 92-year-old mom. Everyone treated her like she was their mom!

**F.V.**

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Thank you, RUMC! A truly wonderful COVID-19 vaccination operation; extremely professional, efficient, courteous, and friendly.

**D. and K.S.**

I just wanted to let you know what a great experience we had getting our vaccinations. The whole process was extremely efficient and the physical set up contributed to the smoothness of the whole operation. The auditorium was an excellent, very comfortable space to wait after we got the shots. But the people, oh the people! What can I say? From the young man on duty outside who was so patient with everyone's questions, to the women who distributed the paper work and directed everyone to the "shot" area. The friendly, upbeat staff who administered the vaccine and the women who managed the process in the auditorium were all reflective of the wonderful RUMC people we have encountered in all of our interactions with RUMC personnel. Thank you again for your assistance and many thanks to Dr. Messina for his leadership in developing such a friendly, caring, truly patient-centric staff.

**P.**

*5<sup>th</sup>  
Annual*

# VIRTUAL RUMC 5K RUN WALK

PARTICIPATION TAKES PLACE BETWEEN  
**FRIDAY, MAY 14–SUNDAY, MAY 23**

IN MEMORY OF ARNOLD OBEY

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*More information to come!*

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