

## Richmond University Medical Center Administers 5,000<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 Vaccination...and Counting!



*Janet Sgarlata receiving her COVID-19 vaccination, four months after undergoing successful liver transplant surgery.*



*Rev. Dr. Demetrius S. Carolina, Sr., director of Central Family Life Center in St. George, receives his vaccination.*

On February 6, Janet Sgarlata became the 5,000<sup>th</sup> person to receive their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at Richmond University Medical Center (RUMC). Sgarlata, 66, who is also a liver transplant recipient, was able to receive the vaccine under the state's Group 1B qualification criteria.

Sgarlata's sister, Karen, was able to secure a vaccination appointment through RUMC's appointment call line for both her sister and their 86-year-old mother, Ellen. Karen had COVID-19 last March and was able to recover at home without spreading the virus to her sister or mother. Karen however was informed she is currently not eligible for vaccination. When she found out, she asked about giving what would have been her appointment to her sister who did qualify and had been trying on her own to get an appointment, but without success. "She needs it more than me anyway," Karen said.

Janet was diagnosed with stage 4 autoimmune hepatitis, and in June of 2020 passed out in a local grocery store. She would spend the next six hours in a coma before recovering enough to go home days later. Then on October 30, 2020, Janet received a second chance at life when she underwent a successful liver transplant. Since the transplant, she has been living in Brooklyn with her sister and mother. Despite reservations because of the transplant, Janet decided to get vaccinated after getting approval from her doctors.

"I am so happy and grateful," Sgarlata said. "It's so hard to get a transplant at my age, I'm just happy to be alive. Now to also get the vaccine on top of this, I feel so blessed. I'm just so happy to be alive."

Following guidelines from the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH), vaccine doses were first administered to frontline employees, medical staff, and practitioners classified by NYS DOH in mid-December 2020. Then on January 13, RUMC also began administering vaccinations to individuals classified by NYS DOH as Group 1B. Group 1B includes people age 65 and older, teachers, education workers, first responders, corrections officers, and public safety and transit workers.

"Vaccinating thousands of people so quickly is a testament to the efficient program we have developed here," president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. "This accomplishment is a source of tremendous pride for everyone involved in developing our vaccination program. It means thousands of people have come to RUMC determined to take back their lives, to tell this virus it is no longer in control. It's truly awe-inspiring."

Also among those recently vaccinated at RUMC was Rev. Dr. Demetrius S. Carolina, Sr., director of Central Family Life Center in St. George. Central Family Life Center is a nonprofit that seeks to improve the lives of Staten Island residents.

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



This month marks a somber event in the history of our hospital. On March 14 of last year, we admitted our first COVID-19 positive patient. And so would begin a journey that continues today. A journey none of us could have expected, but confronted head on nonetheless.

As we mark this one year anniversary it is only fitting that we pause to remember all those lost over the past year to COVID-19. We especially remember our colleagues William Langley, Mary Ellen Porter, and Margaret Venditti. We hold them and everyone lost in our hearts and prayers.

As we look back on the past 12 months, uncertainty has been replaced with growing confidence as we learn more about our invisible enemy. We see the

positive outcomes that result from our medical professionals applying the latest medically-proven effective treatments. And perhaps the most awe-inspiring, we see the thousands of people, including our colleagues, who have rolled up their sleeves to get vaccinated. As highlighted by our front page story, last month we administered our 5,000th first dose of vaccine and this number continues to grow as more and more people step up to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community.

While our successful vaccination program continues, there is no better time to also look forward at the exceptional future that is just around the corner. By now everyone is aware of some of our expansion and renovation projects that will position our hospital at the forefront of healthcare on Staten Island for decades to come. A new Emergency Department and cogeneration power plant; expanded

Surgical and Medical ICU areas with a focus on patient safety and comfort in mind; an elevator modernization project; the replacement of all windows throughout the hospital; and upgrades to convert our Maternal Child patient rooms from semi-private to private. All of these projects are underway or are scheduled to commence shortly. Together we are working to secure a healthier community now and for the future. Richmond University Medical Center is truly leading the way!

**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

On January 13, I received my COVID-19 vaccination. The staff was so courteous, helpful, and professional that it made me feel at ease throughout the entire process. Everyone should feel very proud of the way the staff cared for its patients. It is one more indication of the quality of care patients receive at this outstanding hospital.

**P.M.**

---

I beat COVID-19 through the grace of God. I was in ICU and every single one of the staff members made me feel like it was going to be OK. D Monroe, she's a transport, she did an amazing job. She treated me with respect and dignity. All my nurses went above and beyond for me and the doctors are wonderful...they are really showing us they are a community hospital. Thank you all.

**L.C.**

---

Mom is feeling great today. She asked me to tell you how grateful she is. She cannot get over how well organized everything was. From start to finish it was 30 minutes. Each person at every

station was so kind and caring. She was always kept at a safe distance from everyone. She said the staff was so good with not only her, but other seniors who were on their own. She is walking on air!

**N.G.**

---

Wonderful facility!! The COVID-19 vaccine distribution process was outstanding. The staff were all courteous and caring, explaining every detail along the way making me feel extremely comfortable. Thank you, Team RUMC!! And keep up the excellent work!

**S.P.**

---

I have to be alive for my 100 birthday! I needed this vaccine. I really appreciate this more than words can say. Please thank the entire team that allowed me this gift. I am forever grateful.

**C.A.**



## Bundle of Joy: Staten Island Woman Gives Birth After Spending 30 Days in ICU with COVID-19

For four weeks, Kristin Pryzmocki fought to survive COVID-19. She did so for herself, her husband, Michael, and her unborn son, Michael, Jr. After spending four weeks in the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) at Richmond University Medical Center (RUMC), Pryzmocki went home on November 13, 2020, recovered and ready for the next chapter in her life. On February 4, she returned to RUMC to begin that next chapter, which came in the form of her 9 pound, 2 ounce son, Michael John Pryzmocki, Jr.

"It's an incredible feeling," Pryzmocki said. "After years of trying to start a family, I can't believe he's real, he's really here. After all we have been through the past few months, I remember saying to my husband 'I just want to hear him cry.'"

Pryzmocki contracted COVID-19 in early fall and although she was able to quarantine at home early on, her condition began to worsen, affecting her breathing. She went to RUMC's emergency department on October 16 and was immediately admitted to the MICU where she would stay until her discharge, the entire time on oxygen to help her breath. During her time at RUMC, her husband also tested positive for the virus, but was able to care for himself and recover at home.

While at RUMC, Pryzmocki developed an extended family: the MICU nurses. One nurse in particular, Diane Minett, RN, became a source of hope for Pryzmocki. "She kept saying, 'You can do this,'" Pryzmocki said. "She became my motivator to get better and go home." Pryzmocki and Minett have stayed in touch.

"Everyone in the MICU is just absolutely thrilled for her," Minett said. "We are so excited that she is a new mom. Kristin is just a wonderful person and we know she will be a wonderful mom. Michael, Jr., is going to find out just how lucky he is that she is his mom."

Pryzmocki and her son were discharged on February 8. Before she left, she expressed her love and affection for RUMC and its entire staff. "We love everyone at RUMC," she said. "Everyone went above and beyond for me last year. They are now doing the same again...now for both of us!"



*Kristin Pryzmocki moments after the arrival of her son, Michael, Jr.*

### New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Angela Adragna, *Medical Assistant*

Nike Ajao, *Nursing Assistant*

Elizabeth Alvarez, *Nursing Assistant*

Nandi Ayanru, *Extern*

Kristin Barbella, *CT Tech*

Megha Biju, *Extern*

Ashley Dally, *Supervisor*

Kimberly Daniel, *Case Aide*

Victoria DeBernardo, *Clerk*

Nita Di Verio, *Trauma Child Specialist*

Nancy Keane, *Clerk*

Madiha Master, *Clinical Research Fellow*

Philip Monachino, *Extern*

Rufina Muniz, *LMSW*

Maria Orea Gonzalez, *Clerk*

Valbona Paja, *Clinical Lab Tech*

Claudine Pierre, *LMSW*

Elizabeth Puebla, *Unit Clerk*

Aida Purisic, *Supervisor*

Erin Rogers, *RN Intern*

Juna Skariah, *Nursing Assistant*

Rose Small, *Nursing Assistant*

Susan Stouter Buerkle, *Assistant Manager*

Ilir Tahiri, *Building Service Worker*

Brigida Torres, *Breast Feeding Counselor*

Ines Vucetic, *Manager*

Kayla Westgate, *RN*

Emily Wodzinski, *Extern*

## 16-Year-Old Donating Handmade Pillows to Comfort Cancer Patients



*Victoria Ann Amaniera with some of the handmade pillows she designed for patients receiving care at RUMC's Center for Cancer Care.*

For one 16-year-old young woman, providing comfort to cancer patients as they continue treatments amidst fears of contracting COVID-19 is a mission. Victoria Ann Amaniera of New Jersey has donated over 50 pillows to Richmond University Medical Center's Center for Cancer Care. The heart-shaped pillows are a welcome sight for patients looking to rest their heads during treatment or needing something to squeeze tight during uncomfortable moments.

Amaniera's aunt, Deborah Rodriguez, is the associate director for cancer services at RUMC. After watching so many people's lives impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and knowing that some people, like those battling cancer, had no choice but to continue treatment in fear of possible exposure, Amaniera approached her aunt about wanting to do something. "It's not enough to do nothing just because I'm 16," Amaniera said.

After brainstorming with her aunt, Amaniera decided to follow in her Grandmother Joyce's footsteps. Joyce was a veteran seamstress who passed away in 2009. Amaniera decided to begin sewing pillows. Assisted by her parents Brian and Lori who are originally from Staten Island, Amaniera put needle and thread to work.

"I told Victoria our cancer patients continue to come in even though they are scared of COVID-19," Rodriguez said. "I told Victoria why don't you help these patients feel more comfortable when they come for treatment. We brainstormed and Victoria decided she could make pillows for them. She has clearly inherited her grandmothers' gift."

Amaniera continues to make more pillows and will donate them to RUMC as needed. In some ways Amaniera's special attention to those in need of comfort comes full circle. She was born prematurely, weighing only 2 pounds, 3 ounces at 29 weeks old. She spent the first seven weeks of her life

in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) fighting for her life. Today Amaniera is in 11th grade. She is a student at Edison High School planning on a career in forensics. She has also recently been accepted into the gifted and talented program at Middlesex County College where she will further pursue her interest in photography.

"Speaking for every one of our patients at the Center for Cancer Care, and all our staff, a tremendous thank you to Victoria and her family for thinking of others," president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. "Her pillows are bringing great comfort to our patients and they are touched to know that someone is thinking of them and their well-being."

## South Shore Rotary Donates to Palliative Care, Provides Masks for Medical Staff



*James Young of the South Shore Rotary with RUMC president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE.*

On February 23, James Young, representing the South Shore Rotary, presented a check for \$2,320 to president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, to support the hospital's palliative care program. Young also provided 2,000 surgical masks for employees as a thank you from the Rotary for the heroism personified by the entire staff at RUMC during the COVID-19 pandemic.





## Comprehensive Mental Health Treatment Provided at RUMC's Center for Integrative Behavioral Medicine



*Joel Idowu, MD, chairman, director of residency training and medical director of outpatient services*

The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Services at Richmond University Medical Center has long been Staten Island's premier source for mental health treatment. And in highly stressful times like these, the department's commitment to comprehensive care in a community-based setting has never been more important.

"We are the only organization on Staten Island that offers the complete spectrum of behavioral services, from childhood to adulthood, under one umbrella," said Joel Idowu, MD, chairman, director of residency training and medical director of outpatient services for the department. "We are committed to the community's well-being."

The department's board certified psychiatrists, therapists, and health care professionals are experienced in diagnosing and treating all psychiatric diagnoses and

emotional issues, on both an ongoing and acute basis. In addition to its full range of inpatient and outpatient mental health services, the center also staffs:

- **A mobile crisis unit.** Upon learning a patient is experiencing a severe mental health crisis, a team of social workers, nurses and mental health technicians will come to the patient and his/her family within two hours after getting the call. With a psychiatrist at RUMC on call for consultation, the team provides on-site emergency evaluation and assessment, and refers the patient for services.
- **A dedicated emergency room team.** RUMC has a Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP) to help patients in psychiatric crisis. After a patient arrives during a psychiatric emergency, RUMC psychiatrists and other clinicians evaluate the patient to determine whether inpatient or outpatient treatment is needed. In some cases, the patient can be admitted for up to three days (72 hours) for care and observation, and the CPEP is equipped with five "extended observation" beds for this purpose.

The center is also on the front lines of the opioid addiction crisis. RUMC offers all treatment options for young adults struggling with opioid addiction, from group and one-on-one counseling to medication-assisted therapy. Dr. Idowu estimates that between 40 and 50 patients are receiving opioid addiction therapy at RUMC at a given time.

RUMC also long been at the forefront of inpatient child and adolescent psychiatry. Its merger with the Staten Island Mental Health Society two years ago has led to an expanded array of outpatient child and adolescent psychiatry services, which include:

- School-based outpatient clinics and intervention programs at public schools throughout Staten Island. RUMC counselors and mental health professionals work throughout the school system to ensure timely access to care.
- The Day Treatment Center, a school for children and adolescents in first grade through high school with emotional or behavioral issues.
- Assessment and treatment of children with developmental disabilities, as well as counseling services for young patients and their families.
- One of the nation's first hospital-based Head Start programs. Head Start provides educational, physical and emotional wellness programs to help prepare infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from low-income families for school.

The team of mental health professionals and support staff at RUMC's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Services also offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient mental health services, from medication and neuromodulation, to counseling, group therapy and other psychosocial therapies, to substance abuse and gambling addiction treatment. For more information call 718-818-6132.

# Encouraging Cardiac Patients to Proactively Manage Their Health

Statistics reveal that visits to emergency departments and doctor's offices nationwide declined during the pandemic as patients feared the possibility of exposure to COVID-19 in these settings. The fact is, however, hospitals and medical practices have represented some of the safest spaces for patients during the pandemic and holding off on getting the necessary care for medical conditions, particularly for cardiac patients, could prove to be an even greater health risk.

**“By following all of these protocols, there’s virtually no way to expose our patients to coronavirus, so we’re very comfortable telling our patients that it’s safe to come back.”**

“COVID-19 has impacted people in many ways — especially those with heart-related issues, as the acute infection brought on by COVID-19 can directly affect the heart muscle,” said Francesco Rotatori, MD, FACC, and chair of cardiology. “However, other documented collateral damage from the pandemic is that many cardiac patients have been hesitant to come to the hospital out of fear of contracting COVID-19, which has led to undiagnosed or late diagnosis of heart issues.”

“We’re seeing the consequences of that trend now,” shared Dr. Rotatori, who noted that the pandemic has unfortunately led some heart attack patients to be treated the same way as they were decades ago, before today’s advanced treatments were available.

“Years ago, there were no ‘good’ treatment options for patients who suffered heart attacks, so they were treated conservatively — with rest and observation,” Dr. Rotatori said. “In the same way today, based on their fear of going to the hospital during the pandemic, a lot of heart attack victims stayed home even while having symptoms, so modern treatment options couldn’t be made available to them in a timely fashion. Sadly, some of these individuals died at home, while those who survived are now dealing with serious repercussions of

their cardiac event.” The truth is, he said, “people who experience heart attacks don’t all die; some end up suffering heart failure and the loss of functionality in their heart, leaving them significantly and permanently compromised in terms of their ability to maintain their daily routine.”

“This is what we used to see 30-40 years ago when we didn’t have the current treatments or protocols,” Dr. Rotatori added. “Since then, we’ve developed proactive programs and capabilities such that within 90 minutes of arrival at the hospital, we can open a patient’s clogged artery and salvage most of their heart muscle. However, the fear of COVID-19 has unfortunately turned back the clock for many cardiac patients, allowing what would otherwise be a manageable condition if it were acted on in a timely manner to progress into a more advanced situation that can significantly compromise their quality of life.”

Dr. Rotatori shared the following important messages for cardiac patients:

- **The Hospital is a Safe Place**— While cardiac patients’ concerns during the pandemic are absolutely valid, “as a medical community, we know much more about COVID-19 now than we did a few months ago,” he said. “We adhere to all safety protocols (masking, PPE, cleaning and sanitizing, social distancing, etc.), maintain separate areas of the hospital, know how to isolate patients, and have strict rules in office settings to avoid the transmission of COVID-19. By following all of these protocols, there’s virtually no way to expose our patients to coronavirus, so we’re very comfortable telling our patients that it’s safe to come back.”
- **The Benefits Outweigh the Risks**— According to Dr. Rotatori, “the benefits of seeing a cardiologist for preventative care and/or the immediate management of acute cardiac issues far outweigh the risk of exposure to COVID-19.” For those patients at extremely high risk or overly concerned about venturing out to the emergency department or a doctor’s office during the pandemic, “telemedicine visits can help in some cases and can enhance convenience by avoiding the need to travel, especially in bad weather,” he said.
- **RUMC’s Post COVID-19 Care Center Can Help**— For those patients who have experienced mild or severe cases of COVID-19 and suffered damage to their heart muscle (or any number of other symptoms, such as chronic fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive issues, a fast or irregular heart rhythm, or PTSD-like symptoms) long after their initial COVID-19 infection, Richmond University Medical Center’s unique Post COVID-19 Care Center can help. Through the Center, “we track the effects COVID-19 has had on affected patients long-term, work to better understand the structural components of their symptoms using technology such as echocardiograms and cardiopulmonary stress tests, and develop treatment plans and/or medically-supervised rehab programs to help address them,” he said. “While the novel coronavirus has been challenging to understand, it’s also been exciting to use our intelligence to help uncover clues and develop therapeutic options.”





# Cardiac Patients Get Support at Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation Center



*Kristine Delgado, administrative director of rehabilitation*

Throughout the pandemic, some people in need of non-COVID-19-related health care have been hesitant to seek the medical support they require for fear of being exposed to the coronavirus. This is especially true of high-risk patients dealing with heart failure or coronary artery disease (CAD) or anyone who has had a heart attack, cardiac stents implanted, a heart transplant, or a valve replacement. But at the Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation Center, stringent safety protocols have helped patients comfortably return to their cardiac rehab program — and patients have responded with great enthusiasm.

When the pandemic first bore down on New York City last year, “we closed in mid-March and officially reopened the second week of May, as soon as we could safely do so,” shared Kristine Delgado, administrative director of rehabilitation. “Our patients really wanted to come back because they could see and feel the progress they were making in their rehab programs, but they wanted to know that it was safe for them to return. They missed the routine of being here too, as many had been coming to cardiopulmonary rehab two to three times a week.”

Prior to reopening, Delgado and the hospital team quickly put a number of key measures into place so that they could safely welcome patients back to the facility to resume their beneficial rehab activities.

Among those measures, “we changed the layout of our gym by spacing workout

machines at least six feet apart to ensure adequate space between equipment,” she said, adding that her team was also trained in specialized new cleaning procedures. “We’d always disinfected machines after each patient used them, but now we use different chemicals, which require a 10-minute sit time, so a new technique had to be built into the process,” she said. “We also used to book as many as 12 patients in each of our hour-long classes, but now

we only allow four to five patients in each class to ensure proper social distancing.” Given the reduced capacity in each class, she said, “we’ve done our best to accommodate all of our patients by staggering shifts, running classes later into the day, and adding more class times on Tuesdays and Thursdays.”

“Overall, we’ve been running as many classes as we can five days a week and have employed creative scheduling to ensure that all of our patients get seen without overcrowding,” Delgado said. In addition to the use of masks and PPE, temperature checks, thorough COVID-19 screening for every patient prior to their arrival, and protocols to keep patients socially distanced

while waiting for a class to begin have been incorporated into the routine.

“While the public may feel fatigue over the pandemic, our team knows it’s still very real and that we have to remain vigilant in order to keep our patients and staff members safe,” Delgado said. “Since all patients are now wearing masks while exercising, we’ve modified our rehab program to include fewer repetitions, more frequent breaks, and more frequent monitoring of their O2 stats, and we also request that patients let us know if they feel short of breath or need anything. Despite our challenging new circumstances, we’re dedicated to maintaining the quality of our service delivery and I’m very proud of how our staff has managed it.”

According to Delgado, patients have been extremely grateful for the proactive measures that have allowed them to return to their rehab programs in a safe manner.

“While some of our patients have remained in quarantine for their safety during the pandemic because they’re severely medically compromised, over 80 percent of our patients have resumed their rehab onsite, which says a lot about our program,” Delgado said. “They were excited to come back and have been very understanding

**“Ultimately, we’re all about accommodating patients, making sure that everyone who wants to come will be safe, and getting them back into a healthy routine.”**

of all of the new protocols because they know that we’re doing this for their safety.” At the same time, she said, “we continue to admit a steady stream of new patients, so our program has remained strong and is right where it needs to be.”

While it’s been an unprecedented year, Delgado said that healthcare professionals are used to constantly adapting to make things work for their patients.

“Ultimately, we’re all about accommodating patients, making sure that everyone who wants to come will be safe, and getting them back into a healthy routine,” Delgado confirmed. “Their health and safety is our number one priority.”

## March Observances

Please join us in acknowledging the following health-related observances for the month of March:

### Month-Long

Brain Injury Awareness Month  
National Nutrition Month  
Save Your Vision Month

### Week-Long Observances

Dental Assistants Recognition Week  
March 7 to 13  
Healthcare HR Week  
March 15 to 19  
National Poison Prevention Week  
March 21 to 27  
National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week  
March 22 to 28

### Recognition Days

Baby Sleep Day  
March 1  
Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist Day  
March 10  
World Tuberculosis Day  
March 24  
National Doctors' Day  
March 30

*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

RUN, BIKE, OR WALK IN SUPPORT OF  
RICHMOND UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER'S  
NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (NICU)

**Richmond University**  
▲▲▲ Medical Center

REGISTER, SPONSOR, AND DONATE AT:  
**[WWW.RUMCSI.ORG/5K](http://WWW.RUMCSI.ORG/5K)**