

## Richmond University Medical Center Holds Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Symposium



*Members of the Patient Safety Council Committee gather for a photo.*

On April 29, over 20 projects initiated over the past year at Richmond University Medical Center focusing on increasing patient safety and quality of care were the topics of conversation at the hospital's 7th annual patient safety and quality improvement symposium.

While all projects have led to improvements at Richmond University Medical Center, a panel of judges selected a project from the department of medicine as this year's top entry. The project focused on heart failure patients, how to reduce their hospital readmission rates, and the optimal courses of therapy and medication that should be provided at discharge so they can further their recovery at home and as outpatients.

"Patient safety and providing quality care are the building blocks of our institution," president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. "Richmond University Medical Center is already recognized nationally as a leader in both these areas, yet we continue to explore new initiatives for improvement."

The annual symposium honors the commitment of every individual at RUMC involved in quality improvement and patient safety, including resident physicians, attending physicians, nursing, and administration, who work collaboratively in developing and implementing new concepts. Many of the concepts presented at this year's symposium were researched, developed, and implemented while the staff were also caring for COVID-19 positive patients. Over 3,900 individuals with COVID-19 have been treated and discharged from RUMC since the pandemic began last spring.

"Everything we do at Richmond University Medical Center is with one goal in mind," Dr. Messina said. "To continue delivering on the trust placed in every one of us here by our patients and their families."

Richmond University Medical Center has been recognized recently by national organizations, including The Joint Commission, for providing high quality care while maintaining equally high emphasis on ensuring patient safety.



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



With the approval from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to administer the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to anyone 12 years of age and older, we have reached yet another positive milestone

in overcoming the pandemic and moved yet another step closer to a return to normal. This new decision by the CDC opens vaccination to nearly 17 million teens nationwide. Here at our hospital, the announcement was met with excitement as many parents brought their teens in to our vaccination center as soon as we were given authorization from the New York State Department of Health on May 13.

The efficacy of these vaccines is enabling all of us to move closer to resuming our normal lives and be with one another safely. Close to 17,000 individuals have been vaccinated here at RUMC since January. As more and more people continue to come here for their vaccine,

we also continue to urge those in our own RUMC family who have not yet done so to get vaccinated. While the positivity rate in the community is dropping, the plain fact is that COVID-19 is going to be around for many years to come. As a hospital, we will be treating the most severe cases, which puts anyone not vaccinated at high risk for contracting this virus. I urge everyone to have themselves and their families vaccinated as soon as you have the opportunity.

Vaccinating so many people in such a short amount of time is truly a Herculean effort that would not have been possible if not for those on our staff who have volunteered in our vaccination center and those who have continued to oversee its operation. Tremendous thanks to everyone who has taken time from their everyday activities to spend hours registering people, checking paperwork, administering vaccines, and observing people in our Sipp Auditorium. To everyone involved in its on-going administration, the overall health and well-being of our entire community has greatly improved because of you! You have saved lives and you should take it as

a personal point of pride when you hear someone say, "I got my shot at RUMC." Over a year ago, we were full of fear and uncertainty. Today, our hope has been restored and our faith in the marvels of modern day medicine has been renewed. Thank you to each and every one of you!

Let me close by wishing a Happy Father's Day to everyone at RUMC who has the honor and privilege to be called a dad. As a father myself, and now a grandfather with one more grandchild on the way, it is the journey of a lifetime, full of rewards and cherished moments. There are surely ups and downs, but as most of you will agree, it is a journey not a destination! Happy Fathers' Day!

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Daniel J. Messina in black ink.

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

## Patient Satisfaction: A Note of Thanks

I just had my baby girl at Richmond University Medical Center and I can say it is the best hospital from my life-long experience. Best care team, best service, and best experience! So much care, so much warmth, just everything beyond my expectations!!!

**L.E.**

For the staff at your 1058 Forest Avenue facility,

I love coming here. From the time you are welcomed they take proper precautions such as asking COVID-19 health screening questions and taking temperatures. The facility is always so clean and beautiful. From the doctors to all the staff everyone is so respectful, accommodating, and professional. They always meet your requests. Their phone etiquette is professional. I'm so glad my fiancée told me about this place. I've been attending since October and wouldn't have it any other way, all my needs are met. Excellent service!! The staff such as Ryan, Thomas, the two

ladies named Ashley, Dr. Peter, Dr. Diaz, and many others, this is the place to come. Thank you all for your smiles and bedside manner.

**E.B.**

I am very grateful that I was able to receive my vaccine at RUMC. The entire staff should be commended for their compassion and help. It was very reassuring. Thank you again and God bless everyone at RUMC for their wonderful help.

**M.A.**

As a teacher and part-time operations manager for NYC Test and Trace, this was by far the BEST experience I've had in regards to COVID-19 testing or vaccination. Keep up the great work!

**J.M.**



## RUMC Authorized to Provide COVID-19 Vaccinations to Individuals 12 and Older

On May 13, Richmond University Medical Center received authorization from the New York State Department of Health to immediately begin administering the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to anyone 12 years of age and older. Among the first in the newly approved age group to be vaccinated at RUMC were two 13-year-old friends who have known each other almost since birth.

"We are now at a point in the vaccination process where we are vaccinating different generations in the same household and protecting entire families," president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said.

Gianna Shapiro and Megan Lutz received their first doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine together at RUMC, holding hands throughout the few seconds it took to administer the shot. The two friends first met in day care when they were just six months old, cared for side by side at the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island's Bernikow Building. The two were born only 10 days apart, Lutz on August 7 and Shapiro on August 17. Both said they were excited to begin the vaccine process, which will officially be completed two weeks after they return to RUMC this month to receive their second doses.

"I wanted to get vaccinated so I can hang out with my friends again," Lutz said. "I was so happy driving with my mom over to the hospital for my shot. After I get my second shot, my whole family will all be vaccinated. I know many of my friends are going to get vaccinated too which means we will all be safer and we can be together more."

Despite attending different schools, the friends spend plenty of time together virtually through social media platforms after classes during the week and on weekends. As positivity rates in the community have decreased in recent months, the two have been able to spend more time together in person and with other friends in their age group. Both have also been annual campers at the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island's summer camp since they were first old enough to attend.

"It feels good to know I am getting better protected," Shapiro said. "I know it will keep me, my friends, and my family safe. I wanted to get vaccinated because it also showed I respect other people."

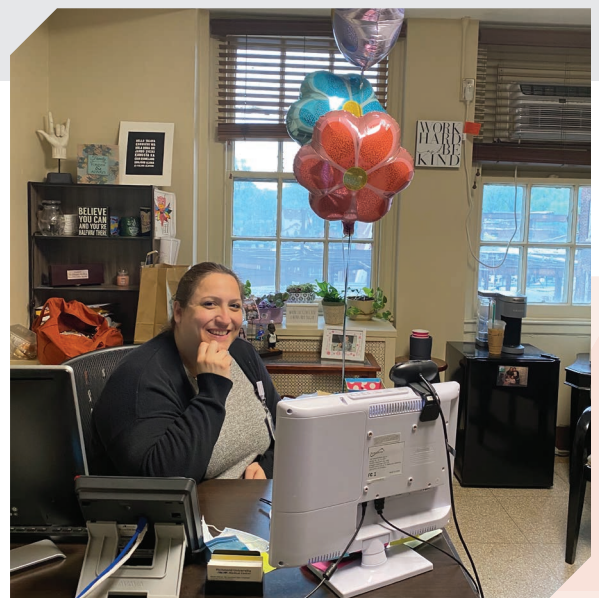


*Lifelong friends Gianna Shapiro (left) and Megan Lutz (right), played together when they were only three years old. Now, 10 years later, the pair sat side by side to receive their first doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.*

## Celebrating Those Who Help Others Communicate

May 5 was National Interpreter Appreciation Day. Celebrated on the first Wednesday of May, the day celebrates experts who connect those who want to communicate but do not speak the same language. Richmond University Medical Center marked the day by thanking director of Language Access, Nicole Safford, NIC, EIPA- American Sign Language, for her dedication to our patients and their families.

*Director of Language Access, Nicole Safford, NIC, EIPA- American Sign Language*



# Steel Beam Bearing Names of Hospital Supporters Secured into ED Superstructure



(left) Supporters of RUMC signed the ceremonial white beam on October 27, 2020. That beam was lowered into place as part of the hospital's new emergency department's steel structure on May 11, 2021.

Last October, over 50 people including local dignitaries, donors, and physicians signed a white steel support beam, leaving their mark forever on the structure of Richmond University Medical Center's new state-of-the-art emergency department. On May 11, 2021, that beam was secured into place atop the steel skeleton that will become the new ED when it is completed in early 2022.

"The new Emergency Department will be a beacon to all of Staten Island that the most advanced emergency care, latest evidence-based medicine, and

cutting edge technology is here. This emergency department will benefit Staten Island for many generations to come," president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said.

The new ED will provide 35,000 square feet of space, compared to 15,000 square feet in the current ED, which was built in 1978. Private treatment rooms, trauma bays, and specialty areas for pediatrics and urgent care will be located on the ground floor, with the second floor used for upgrades and expansion, including brand-new operating rooms.

Atop the white beam, construction crews secured the American flag and a small evergreen tree, known as the "topping tree." Topping trees celebrate completion of the skeleton of a building's structure. They are considered a talisman for good luck and prosperity for the future occupants of the building. The first evidence of trees being hoisted atop buildings for this reason was in 700 AD in Scandinavia.

## New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Samantha Acosta, *Nursing Assistant*  
Oluwakemi Adewumi, *Nursing Assistant*  
Taylor Allen, *PCT*  
Michelle Andolfo, *RN*  
Danielle Aylmer, *RN*  
Alison Bohnenberger, *RN*  
Kelly Ann Cameron, *LMSW*  
Christina Choi, *Clinical Lab Tech*  
Felicia Ciociari-Cook, *RN*  
Denzel Cortes, *Food Service Worker*  
Calise Cummings, *Guest Rep*  
Sabina Duskic, *Ultrasound Tech*

Lukas Dzedzina, *Paramedic*  
Frank Ferraro, *DRT*  
Lara Garris, *Unit Assistant*  
Melanie Gomez, *RN*  
Valentina Guercio, *Unit Clerk*  
Abby Hu, *Pharmacy Tech*  
Kashayla Jackson, *Nursing Assistant*  
Naftali Krauss, *Paramedic*  
Sky Lin, *Radiology Tech*  
Timika Mattice, *Nursing Assistant*  
Pamela Mineo, *RN*  
Michael Moore, *Security Guard*

Allison Orisino, *RN*  
Olivia Perricone, *EMT Driver*  
Eldona Sainovski Sr, *PA*  
Mohammad Shozub, *Director*  
Victor Song, *Payroll Clerk*  
Elmadije Suma, *Building Service Worker*  
Christina Tenteromano, *RN*  
Zenit Varghese, *Pharmacy Tech*  
Christopher Wagner, *Apprentice*  
Renee Winkworth, *Office Coordinator*  
Kaylah Woods Food, *Service Worker*





## RUMC Recognizes May as National Mental Health Awareness Month

*Left to right: RUMC President and CEO Daniel J. Messina PhD, FACHE, tied white ribbons for May is National Mental Health Awareness Month alongside Director of Health and Wellness for Staten Island Borough President James Oddo, Dr. Ginny Mantello; Staten Island Deputy Borough President Ed Burke; RUMC Chair for Behavioral Health Services, Joel Idowu, MD; RUMC Chief Operating Officer and Chief Nursing Officer Rosemarie Stazzone RN, MS, NE-BC; and RUMC Vice President for Behavioral Health Services Joann Pietro.*

Since 1949, America has observed May as National Mental Health Awareness Month. On May 12, Richmond University Medical Center leadership, staff, and community leaders tied white ribbons around trees on hospital property to bring attention to the needs of individuals who struggle with mental health illness.

"Many individuals struggle with mental illness in silence and alone. Mental illness affects people of all ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and professions," RUMC president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in five adults in the United States and one in six youths between the ages of six and 17 experiences a mental health condition in a given year. Richmond University Medical Center is the leading provider of behavioral health and substance use assistance programs on Staten Island for adults, adolescents, and children.

"We want the people of Staten Island to know we are here for them, and ready to assist them, whatever their needs are," vice president for Behavioral Health Services, Joanne Pietro, said. "Thanks to our

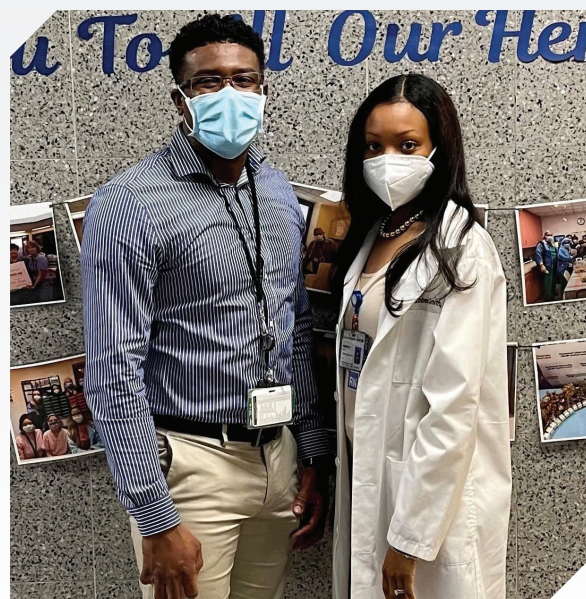
compassionate behavioral health staff, many individuals seeking help have found a family of professionals and experts who are providing them with unparalleled person-centered care found nowhere else on Staten Island."

Joining RUMC leadership and staff to tie ribbons commemorating May as National Mental Health Awareness Month were Staten Island Deputy Borough President Ed Burke; Director of Health and Wellness for Staten Island Borough President James Oddo, Dr. Ginny Mantello; and Morgan Mazarella, representing Staten Island District Attorney, Michael McMahon.



## Congratulations, Graduates!

Congratulations to Humroy Mendez, BS, and Kimberly Smith, BS, RN, BSN, on earning their masters' degrees in May. Mendez earned his degree in data science from St. John's University's College of Professional Studies. Smith earned her degree in business management and leadership from the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Professional Studies. Both are members of the hospital's Population Health/ACO team.



# Lessons from the pandemic: Health care heroes look back on challenging year on the front lines



*Jay Nfonoyim, MD, vice chair of medicine, program director of internal medicine, and chief of Critical Care, receiving his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine on December 15, 2020.*

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that not all lessons are learned in a classroom setting; many are hard-won at the hands of a difficult or challenging experience. Such was the case with the unprecedented coronavirus, which bore down on New York City with a vengeance.

For those who do not believe that the pandemic ever existed, “it’s not a conspiracy or a hoax,” said Laura Kwasny, nurse manager of the Critical Care units. Kwasny and colleague Jay Nfonoyim, MD, vice chair of medicine, program director of internal medicine, and chief of critical care, discussed some of the personal and professional

lessons they took away from the pandemic over the past year.

## On Treating COVID-19

“As we learned more through our ongoing research and the collaborative environment created between physicians in all institutions around the world, our standard of care protocols evolved and outcomes have improved,” Dr. Nfonoyim said.

“Clinically, we’ve definitely learned more about what works and what doesn’t for patients who are critically ill with COVID-19,” Kwasny said. “Death rates are lower today and we have a better understanding of the use of the prone position (keeping patients on their stomach) and other treatments. But we’ve also learned that there’s no cure-all and that these things don’t work for every patient.”

As part of the hospital’s desire to learn even more, “we now have a Post-COVID-19 Care Center to monitor our patients’ progress with COVID-19 and help them rehab,” Kwasny said. “In the weeks and months following discharge, patients can experience everything from fatigue, headaches, cardiac issues, cognitive issues, clotting issues and more, but our new Post-COVID-19 Care Center tracks our patients and offers them access to a range of different specialists in one convenient place.”

## On Their Teams

“I learned that our nursing team is invincible — the time and the blood, sweat, and tears they put into our patients is amazing,” Kwasny said of the 70 ICU nurses and 15 ancillary staff members she supervises. “Despite being exposed to COVID-19 themselves and their fears of bringing it home to their families, our nurses kept coming back to work, taking care of their patients, and banding together as a united family; nobody was above any job and we all pulled together at every level.”

As a leader who oversees all of the hospital’s internal medical residents and whose team addressed all COVID-19-related issues, Dr. Nfonoyim had a similar experience. “When COVID-19 hit us, we knew it was dangerous, but our team had the mindset that we’d handle it together and were going to take care of it,” he said. “Every patient loss hit our doctors and nurses so hard and we mourned them all, especially those individuals who died alone, but we always did our best to focus our attention around the care of patients.”

## On Themselves

“The pandemic was a once-in-a-lifetime call to duty and all team members depended on one another to answer the call,” Dr. Nfonoyim said. “I learned that as much as I wanted to express what I was feeling, it was better for me to focus my efforts on supporting our team members, giving them my shoulder to cry on, and then crying later when I got home, which I still do,” he said of his management style during the pandemic. “Seeing so many people dying, and dying alone, is exhausting, and takes an emotional toll on you. However, our hospital made psychologists and psychiatrists available to us, and our team now debriefs after every episode so that we can share our feelings as a group and move on in a positive way, so it’s getting better.”

For Kwasny, “I learned that I never questioned my career choice — I always wanted to be a nurse and that was confirmed over the past year,” she said. “I couldn’t be prouder of my team, how they handled the pandemic, and how they’re still handling it every day.”

## On the Present ... and Future

According to Dr. Nfonoyim, it was “wonderful” to be the first member of the Richmond University Medical Center staff to be vaccinated on Dec. 15, 2020. “Not only was it an honor to be the first, but I felt that I now had additional protection to go back out to the COVID-19 battleground,” he said.

On that note, “my hope is that the community recognizes the importance of getting vaccinated,” Kwasny said. “We’ve been offering vaccines at the hospital since January and community members have been so grateful to get them.”

For those individuals who are hesitant about getting the vaccine, Dr. Nfonoyim reminds them that COVID-19 is a deadly disease. “The choice isn’t really about taking or not taking the vaccine,” he said, “but rather about not taking the vaccine and getting COVID-19.”



*Laura Kwasny, nurse manager of RUMC’s Critical Care units.*



# Radiation Oncology Department brings cutting-edge treatments and hope to Staten Islanders



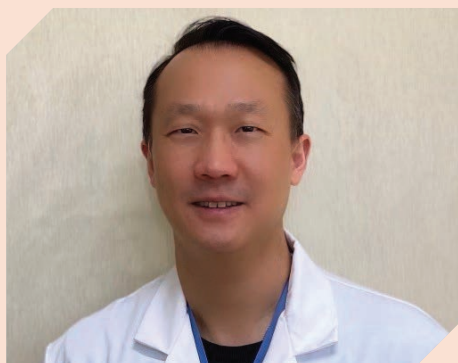
Marc Adams, MD, Director, Radiation Oncology Department

As cancer treatment continues to shift from more disease focused management to patient-centered care, the role of radiation oncology has become an increasingly important and effective component of many cancer patients' care plans.

Part of a range of oncology specialties that include surgical, medical, hematologist, and diagnostic oncology, "radiation oncology involves the use of ionizing radiation to treat predominantly cancer and some other non-malignant conditions," shared Marc Adams, MD, director of Radiation Oncology, which has been housed in the hospital's Center for Cancer Care since 2018. "Rather than being administered all over the body, radiation is primarily a local type of therapy designed to treat a problem in a particular area and can be curative and/or used with chemotherapy as well as pre- or post-operatively."

According to Dr. Adams and colleague Hoon Lee, MD, board-certified radiation oncologist, the hospital utilizes a range of cutting-edge techniques in the field of radiation oncology that not only drive the best outcomes but reduce potential toxicity for patients along the way. Those techniques include:

• **Deep Inspiratory Breath Hold (DIBH):** "For breast cancer patients, we can employ a special planning scan that monitors their breathing cycle and administers radiation only when they're in a certain phase of breathing, a process known as DIBH," Dr. Adams said. "This technique minimizes exposure to structures below the breast (such as the heart and lung), especially for patients with left-side breast cancer."



Hoon Lee, MD, radiation oncologist

• **Prone Positioning:** For breast cancer patients who cannot tolerate breath monitoring, "we have a prone breast positioning system through which we can treat patients lying on their stomach," Dr. Lee said. "In that case, the device delivers treatment from a position below the patient's body and can spare tissues underneath the breast."

• **Shorter Courses:** Dr. Adams said that advancements in treatment delivery have resulted in shorter courses of radiation therapy than in the past. "For example, most breast cancer patients can be treated with hypofractionated radiation, through which they undergo a fewer number of treatments than with standard

**"Patients coming here enjoy our convenient location, private and park-like setting, ample parking, and personalized approach."**

radiation," he said of an approach that in many cases can reduce a five-day-a-week or six- to seven-week course to only a three- to four-week course.

• **4D Radiation Therapy:** For patients with cancer of the lung or other body parts that are not fixed and who may not be good candidates for surgery based on other co-morbidities, "the use of 4D radiotherapy and 4D CT simulation enables us to secure scans that map out the movement of the tumor and adapt treatment accordingly," Dr. Lee said. "When we combine 4D planning and scanning capabilities with image-guided therapy, we're able to incorporate the dimension of time to ensure that we're targeting the tumor properly and

precisely," he said, adding that this approach has been very effective and well-tolerated in patients with early-stage lung cancer.

• **Biocompatible Hydrogel and Brachytherapy:** "For prostate cancer patients, the placement of SpaceOAR® biocompatible hydrogel behind the prostate adds space between the prostate and rectum and helps decrease irritation to the rectum," Dr. Adams said. "In addition, we have high-dose brachytherapy technology, through which we can precisely position radiation treatment to address gynecologic malignancies, and we also have a PET-CT scanner, which is useful in many areas of oncology, especially when monitoring patients in terms of treatment response and evaluation of disease status."

Recently, RUMC's Radiation Oncology Department received accreditation from the American College of Radiation Oncology (ACRO), a well-known, internationally recognized body that evaluates oncology radiation practices. "ACRO has very detailed requirements regarding expertise, processes, equipment, quality assurance programs, staffing, training, and more. We're very proud to be fully accredited," Dr. Adams said.

According to Dr. Lee, the hospital's Center for Cancer Care at 1000 South Avenue offers patients even more. "We've operated a very private and safe facility outside of the hospital setting through the pandemic, which is reassuring for oncology patients, who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19," shared Dr. Lee, who noted that the facility remained in full service during the pandemic due to its vigilant adherence to safety protocols. "Patients coming here enjoy our convenient location, private and park-like setting, ample parking, and personalized approach, and we take pride in providing compassionate and individualized attention to each patient."



## June Observances

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

### Month-Long

Cataract Awareness

Liver Health Matters

Men's Health

National Headache and Migraine Awareness

PTSD Awareness

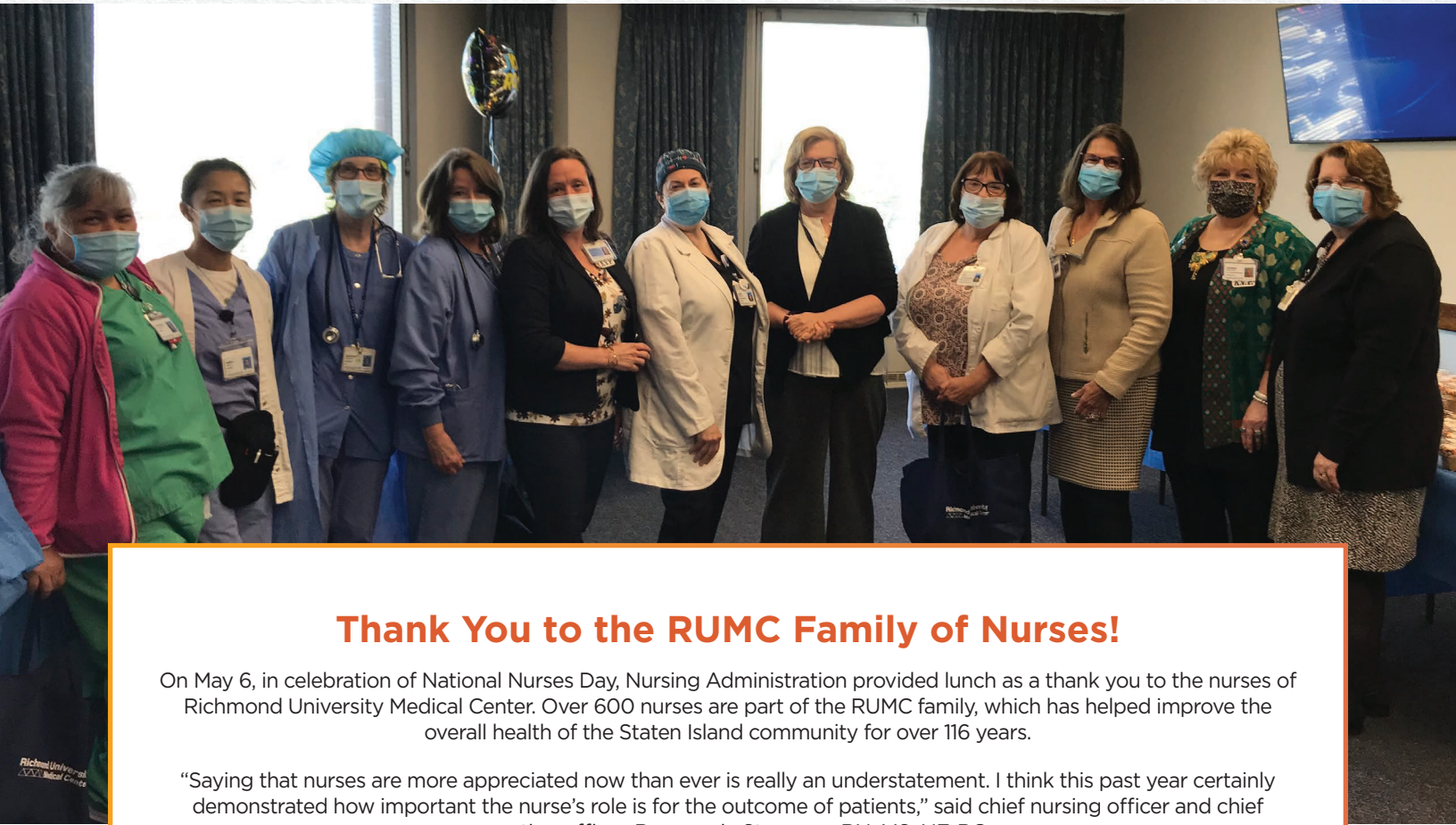
Scleroderma Awareness

### Week-Long Observances

Men's Health Week: June 15 to 21

National Nursing Assistants Week: June 17 to 24

Healthcare Risk Management Week: June 21 to 25



## Thank You to the RUMC Family of Nurses!

On May 6, in celebration of National Nurses Day, Nursing Administration provided lunch as a thank you to the nurses of Richmond University Medical Center. Over 600 nurses are part of the RUMC family, which has helped improve the overall health of the Staten Island community for over 116 years.

"Saying that nurses are more appreciated now than ever is really an understatement. I think this past year certainly demonstrated how important the nurse's role is for the outcome of patients," said chief nursing officer and chief operating officer, Rosemarie Stazzone, RN, MS, NE-BC.

