



Heart to Heart

NEWS FROM ST. LUKE COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

THE POWER OF PREVENTION

Regular visits key for preventing diabetes, hypertension

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FAMOUSLY SAID, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” St. Luke Primary Care Physician Dr. Laura Hoganson wholeheartedly agrees. She said she needs to see her patients for a check up at least once a year in order to make sure they’re healthy and managing risk for conditions like diabetes and hypertension.

At those appointments Dr. Hoganson collects basic information about her patients such as weight and blood pressure. This information combined with a patient’s unique history can help her identify whether they are at risk for diabetes or hypertension before the conditions develop. At-risk patients are then provided with resources and advice on how to best prevent these life-altering conditions from developing.



NICOLE TAVENNER PHOTO

Dr. Laura Hoganson encourages community members to attend regular, preventative visits with their primary care physician to ensure that healthcare interventions can be implemented before an irreversible condition develops.

“We want to catch things early rather than late,” Dr. Hoganson said. She notes that once someone has diabetes, they carry that diagnosis forever. Regular preventative visits ensure that healthcare interventions can be implemented before an irreversible condition develops.

Dr. Hoganson said she recommends her patients make changes to a healthy lifestyle. That includes choosing healthy foods from the outside aisles in the grocery store, and getting at least 30 minutes of exercise five days a week. At regular preventative visits she can

give her patients personalized advice on building habits that will make them healthiest in their unique circumstances. “You might not feel sick, but there might be small damage building up over time,” she said. “There’s less we can do about it once it gets to crisis mode.”

Additional health benefits come with prevention. Individuals with hypertension, diabetes and obesity are generally more susceptible to other illnesses – including the COVID-19 virus.

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Medicare annual wellness visits support continued health

REGULAR PREVENTATIVE HEALTH SCREENINGS ARE IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, and those covered by Medicare can get an annual visit free of charge. At these visits doctors assess patients’ risks for a variety of health issues, and can recommend treatment if necessary.

Dr. Ed Vizcarra, a family practice physician at the St. Luke Community Healthcare clinic in Ronan, performs these check ups. “These visits allow us to review a patient’s past medical history and whether they are up date on screening,” Dr. Vizcarra said.

At this annual visit each patient is given all necessary, age-appropriate screenings for health issues. Physicians take into account each patient’s history and health condition and provides screenings that are appropriate. These can include screenings for osteoporosis, diabetes, cardiovascular problems and cholesterol.

“Medicare wants to know if all of those things have been mentioned to you,” Dr. Vizcarra said, “And if you need them, they allow us to order those tests.”

The visit includes a screening for physical falls, which can be a significant source of disability and shortened lifespan for older adults. Physicians also check on whether an individual needs any vaccines and can provide smoking cessation resources when needed. Patients are also screened for mental illnesses, like depression.

“The depression screening is extremely important because for many older folks there’s a stigma against admitting you’re depressed,” Dr. Vizcarra said. “It’s important to broach those subjects because the alternative is to not broach them at all.”

The visit includes opportunities for patients to express their wishes for end of life care. Patients also fill out a form that states their preferences for treatment in the event they are unable to communicate their own wishes in an emergency situation. These proactive measures allow patients to have autonomy over their future care.

While Medicare annual wellness visits do cover a lot of health territory, they’re not to be confused with a regular physical,

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DR. JONES, DR. GOCHIS WILL BE MISSED, WISHED FOND FAREWELL

IN MY 26-YEAR CAREER IN HEALTHCARE I HAVE HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE OF WORKING WITH SOME OUTSTANDING PHYSICIANS. Two physicians that rise to the top of that list are Dr. Heather Jones and Dr. Paul Gochis.

I still remember meeting each of them for the first time and speaking with them about St. Luke and the ability to practice full spectrum family medicine, describing the unique opportunity a family medicine physician has at St. Luke to work in the emergency department, cover inpatient, run an outpatient clinic, and deliver babies, if interested.

For 20-plus years that is what Drs. Jones and Gochis did. They excelled in family medicine and through it have touched the lives of our community, their patients, and my own family in innumerable ways. They have helped weave the values of Service, Generosity, Kindness, and Excellence into the fabric of DNA at St. Luke. These values will live on through the example they have set and the work they have done.

It is with mixed emotions that I will wish them well as they pursue a new future, one that allows them to “semi retire,” to have some more free time to pursue their other passions. As a friend, I am happy to see the fruits of their labor come to fruition – for them to enjoy new and exciting opportunities and for me and my family to have a place to stay if we need to go south during the winter.

For St. Luke I am sad to see two exceptional physicians depart. Each has developed a large practice of patients. I am comforted in knowing that we have an excellent group of physicians, many of them who have been mentored by Drs. Gochis and Jones, and have already shown that they are capable of filling the gap. Both Dr. Gochis and Dr. Jones have been instrumental in training and recruiting a great

group of physicians that we presently have to serve our community. Rest assured the great care you have come to expect from Dr. Jones and Dr. Gochis will live on through our present group of physicians that will step up to serve their patients.

While Drs. Jones and Gochis have been there for the St. Luke family, they have also been there for my own family: Celebrating the birth of my children, attendance at innumerable birthdays and holidays, providing well child checks, suturing multiple lacerations, helping to counsel teenage girls, and too many other experiences to share. They have seen my girls grow up and have been there for my wife, Jill, and me through it all. And we have enjoyed watching their babies (puppies) grow up. That is the beauty of family medicine physicians – they really become part of your family. Dr. Jones and Dr. Gochis will always remain a part of the St. Luke family and mine as well.

Drs. Jones and Gochis will be wrapping up things in late August. At the end of September, we are pleased to announce that we will be adding Dr. Isaac Billings (Dr. Isaac – as he has asked to be called) to our care team. Dr. Isaac will join the Ridgewater provider staff of Dr. Kelli Larson, Mike Schallock PA, and Claire Nickless PA. Dr. Isaac will be providing full spectrum family medicine including obstetrics like many of our other physicians. There are also plenty of other physicians to meet the needs of our patients (visit www.stlukhealthcare.org to see a full list of our providers).

As Winnie the Pooh said, “How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard,” and I am fortunate to relate to that on many levels. They will both be missed by everyone here at St. Luke.



Steve

“If you have a healthy baseline, your body has more to work with if it does come across some illness.”

- Dr. Laura Hoganson, Primary Care Physician

Regular visits (from page 1)

Dr. Alex Nutt works in the emergency room at St. Luke Community Hospital. He sees patients who have acute medical problems, some of which are related to a lack of preventative treatment. He agrees with Dr. Hoganson, that preventative care produces far better outcomes than emergency care. He compared preventative healthcare to oil changes in a car.

“It benefits you in the long run rather than the short run,” he said. “You wouldn’t drive your car until the engine seized and say ‘I should’ve changed the oil 20,000 miles ago.’”

Dr. Nutt also pointed out that visiting a primary care provider regularly means patients have more continuous care. Providers get to know their patients, and can help them create customized long-term plans for better health. Primary care providers understand their patient’s background, history, and life circumstances, so they can provide more nuanced care. Emergency care providers focus on solving the most immediate crisis that brings a patient to the department.

“In the moment we can fix whatever brought them in that day, but it’s not a long term answer for anything, especially with hypertension and diabetes” he said.

A visit to the ER also generally costs more than a series of preventative visits to a primary care physician.

Dr. Nutt noted that he sees a lot of people in the emergency room who are young and healthy — from about age 20 to 40 — who don’t regularly see their primary care physicians. Even for those who seem to be healthy, regular doctor visits ensure that conditions that do develop will be caught and treated early, before they become acute.

Conditions like hypertension and diabetes can’t be solved in one visit to the emergency room. Instead, building a foundation of good health requires a slow, deliberate process. That foundation requires regular assessment by a physician.

“If you have a healthy baseline, your body has more to work with if it does come across some illness,” Dr. Hoganson said. “If you have a healthier body, you have a better chance for good outcomes.”



SUMMER GODDARD / VALLEY JOURNAL

Dr. Alex Nutt, with St. Luke Community Healthcare’s Emergency Department, speaks to a patient about the importance of regular visits with their primary care provider.



SUMMER GODDARD / VALLEY JOURNAL

ER visits can fix what brings a patient in at the moment, but aren’t a long term answer for anything Dr. Nutt cautions, especially when it comes to managing chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension.

HEALTH WATCH

For those experiencing suicidal thoughts, or know someone who is: please reach out.

1-800-273-8255

[SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Text MT to 741-741

Medicare annual visits (from page 1)

Dr. Vizcarra explained. Though these visits are intended to make sure a patient’s overall health needs are being met, full exams are not performed during annual Medicare appointments. Medi-

care annual visits can be combined with an annual physical, but both are billed separately.

“It’s part of preventative healthcare management,” Dr. Vizcarra said. “And honestly, that’s the best way to fight debilitating disease – to prevent it.”

FOUNDATION NEWS: Annual foundation auction goes virtual

OUR ANNUAL FOUNDATION AUCTION 2020 IS GOING VIRTUAL IN SEPTEMBER!

Be watching our website and social media for more details.

We know that it would not be in the collective best interest to bring a large group of people together in these next few months so we are shifting gears to make the best of these times.

The year 2020 has been life changing for all of us. First and foremost, we hope you are navigating through it as unscathed as possible. The changes we’ve already faced have been tremendous, and undoubtedly there will be more to come. What we know for sure, is that healthcare remains a vital

service within our community and we must be there for the people who count on us, because healthcare can never be cancelled.

As you know, we hold our Annual Foundation Dinner & Auction every fall in September. This event raises a significant amount of money each year to accomplish some specific and critical goals to benefit our community. Last year you helped us raise the final amount to purchase the 3D Mammography machine. This year we will be focusing on maternal and child services, to improve outcomes around depression, substance use and mental health.

What is very different this year is the fact that businesses have been impacted

and may not be able to participate this year as in previous years. Historically, through the donation of auction items and sponsorships, we’ve raised funds for services, technology or equipment. We are extremely sensitive to the impact, and we don’t want to put any undue pressure on any of our business friends in the valley this year.

So we are reaching out, but we’re listening carefully to you as to how you want to be involved. If that includes the donation of an auction item or sponsorship, wonderful. If it means you simply want to participate in the online auction in September, wonderful. If you can offer an idea for a creative or unique auction item, or a connection to an

artisan or craftsman, wonderful. If that means you’re struggling and only able to send words of encouragement toward our efforts, we thank you. Whatever is best for you this year, we support.

None of us could have predicted that 2020 might be a year that would test our tenacity, our perseverance and our faith, all at the same time. Our focus is health, both individual and community, because we are, and always have been, in this together.

- Teresa Nygaard, Foundation Director, tnygaard@stlukehealthcare.org, 528-5324

“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.” - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



BIGSTOCK PHOTO

Without regular checkups, health problems can go unnoticed.

Well child checks important for all ages

AT CERTAIN AGES, CHILDREN NEED TO VISIT THE DOCTOR FOR REGULAR CHECK-UPS: if they’re getting vaccinations as young children, or participating in school sports. But children of all ages should see their primary care provider for a well-child check every year. Those who don’t need vaccines or a clean bill of health often don’t attend regular check-ups, where doctors can catch health and developmental problems before they become severe.

Nurse practitioner David Vaughan said he notices that parents often don’t bring their children in for well-child checks between the ages of four and twelve. Those ages include significant milestones where doctors can diagnose and treat a wide variety of conditions. Without regular checkups, those problems might go unnoticed until they’re seriously damaging to the child.

Healthcare providers assess children’s wellbeing on a wide variety of criteria. Those that are particularly important for children ages 4 to 12 include their metabolism, speech, mental health, language, dental health, vision, and hearing. Sports physicals can be administered during a regular well child check.

Keeping regular appointments also ensures that a healthcare provider has a relationship with a child. Providers who know their patients better, and over the long term, are able to provide them more customized care.

Vaughan advises patients to make seeing their primary care provider a priority, even if there’s another provider available for another appointment sooner. He cautions

parents to schedule well child checks far in advance. “We want the continuity of the same set of eyes looking at them year after year,” Vaughan explained. The COVID-19 pandemic also presents additional challenges that providers may be able to address at

a well child check. The virus has disrupted many children’s schedules and isolated them, which has been a source of stress. Children have missed sports events and milestones like prom and families are struggling with the economic impacts of the pandemic. At a well child check a provider assesses a child’s mental and behavioral health. If the child is struggling a provider can give the family the tools they need to ensure their child is healthy.

Vaughan said patients shouldn’t avoid attending well child checks because of the coronavirus pandemic. It’s safe for families to go to their appointments, and clinics are operating on normal schedules. St. Luke is taking care to screen patients for the virus before they’re in contact with others in the clinics. Patients are

required to wear masks. A well child check is not an appointment where doctors assess existing concerns or conditions. Instead, providers use them to screen the child for unknown conditions.

“We really want to see kids when they’re at their normal self, without illness,” Vaughan said. “That way we can look for developmental issues.”

Many insurance providers will cover preventative visits like well child checks in full. For details on the rules for specific insurance plans, call your insurance provider.

“We really want to see kids when they’re at their normal self, without illness. That way we can look for developmental issues.”

- David Vaughan, St. Luke nurse practitioner

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Quarter 2:
Colleen Adler
Health Information Officer (H.I.M.)



A long-time employee of St. Luke, Colleen consistently displays drive and perseverance. She is comfortable when working with customers, and everyone else! Colleen is kind and approachable and wants the best outcomes for St. Luke. You can easily see this in her day-to-day decisions concerning “what is the best process” or “what is best for this individual.”

Quarter 3:
Bruce Genzel
Surgery



Bruce mirrors St. Luke’s mission, by providing exemplary customer service. Patient surveys often mention him by name and staff share that they can always count on him. Bruce is an excellent communicator, is pleasant to work with, and he takes time to do things the right way, the first time. He strives to do his best every day and it shows!

PROVIDER DIRECTORY

St. Luke Community Clinic – Ronan
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Joanna Billings, DO
William Cullis, MD
John Foster, MD
Laura Hoganson, MD
Megan Vigil, MD
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Kim Damrow, MD
406-676-4441

Preventative foot care critical for diabetics

HEALTHY FEET ARE THE FOUNDATION FOR A HEALTHY BODY, and those with diabetes must be especially attentive to their feet.

Dr. James Clough is a podiatric surgeon at St. Luke. He does annual checkups on his diabetic patients’ feet, and advises them on keeping their feet healthy.

Diabetes can cause poor circulation in the feet, and a condition called neuropathy, where people are unable to feel strong sensations in their feet. Because some people with diabetes are unable to feel much sensation in their feet, they are at risk for having a foot injury that becomes serious when they don’t notice it immediately.

“The tendency is to ignore the feet if you can’t feel them,” Dr. Clough said.

If foot injuries go untreated, they can develop into serious, permanent issues that could require amputation.

With proper care and monitoring though, diabetics can maintain healthy feet. Dr. Clough recommends annual visits with a podiatrist, who can check on a

patient’s circulation in their feet, screen them for loss of feeling, and identify any other potential risks for foot injury. These visits ensure that a healthcare professional catches foot health problems before they become serious.

“Diabetics do quite well if they have regular foot care,” Dr. Clough added.

During appointments Dr. Clough recommends methods his patients can use to keep their feet healthy. These include wearing protective footwear, regularly clipping toenails, and inspecting feet each day. He

provides specific instructions for these daily at-home foot exams.

If a diabetic or their caregiver notices any foot injuries during a home exam—including blisters, bunions, or corns—he or she should immediately see a physician. The key is addressing injuries before they become serious, Dr. Clough explained.

“A lot of people think if they don’t have pain they don’t have a problem,” he said. “That’s the wrong approach with diabetes.”

“A lot of people think if they don’t have pain they don’t have a problem. That’s the wrong approach with diabetes.”

- Dr. James Clough, podiatric surgeon

ECF PROFILE: Lurline ‘Lena’ Howe

FROM THE TIME SHE WAS BORN in 1939 in Madera, California, Lurline “Lena” Howe has been a woman in motion. Preferring the river to the ocean and the open road to her living room, Lena has a fiery spirit that is evident as soon as you have the pleasure of meeting her. The youngest of four girls, Lena’s fondest memories are of time spent playing with her sisters. The girls often ran barefoot through the forests of Arkansas, where they also rode horses and foraged for wild berries. She recalls her father being a bit of a jokester who was known to tell scary stories at bedtime. If you ask Lena to tell you a story, she’s likely to follow in her father’s footsteps and spin you a yarn of hauntings and mystery.

Sweethearts since childhood, Lena and her husband, Roger, were married for 58 years. They had two children together, Loretta and Oral. Lena worked in construction. As part of the Teamsters Labor Union, she was a masterful concrete finisher. She had to work diligently in a field that was dominated by men, but her work spoke for itself and she



Lena Howe

soon gained a reputation for her fine crafts-woman-ship. Lena is modest about “breaking the mold” for other women interested in the construction field. She reports that she simply did what she had to do to provide for her children.

Lena also loves to look at old photos and talk about her travels, having scores of memories to choose from. She had her own Harley (which Roger nicknamed “the hog”), and she rode alongside her husband all across the U.S. Her favorite road trip was to Yosemite Park, where she could enjoy the breathtaking scenery with a wide-open view. Roger has since passed away, but Lena feels grateful to have a support system in her family. Her grandson, Michael, who she raised, is her biggest supporter and comes often to visit. “I can hear him coming way down the road,” she says, as he always pulls up on a motorcycle, bringing back fond memories for Lena.

Lena still loves to be outside every chance she gets and has made some special connections with the staff at St. Luke’s Extended Care Facility. She says Justin in particular is fun to be around. “He’s calming and likes to spend time talking with me.” Lena enjoys window visits from her grandson and seems to be taking the challenges of COVID-19 in stride. She says she’s itching to get out more though, which hopefully she can do soon.

What lesson can we learn from Lena? So many, but easily one would be “a rolling stone doesn’t collect dust!”

NUTRITION CORNER



Food as medicine

AN INCREASED AWARENESS FOR THE VALUE OF PROTECTING OUR HEALTH has been a positive effect of the coronavirus pandemic. Preventative health has become more important as we discover that many diet-related conditions increase one’s risk of contracting a more severe case of COVID-19. So what can be done to help reduce risk of type 2 diabetes, obesity and heart disease? Fortunately a fat-free, sugar-free diet won’t be necessary. In fact, restricting or labeling foods as “off limits” makes maintaining healthy habits more difficult and is one of the reasons diets usually aren’t successful.

Instead of focusing on what shouldn’t be eaten, let’s focus on what we should eat more of! In turn, this will moderate the amounts of less desirable foods in our diet and create long term success. Two recommendations that Americans consistently fall short on are their vegetable and legume (beans, lentils, etc.) intake. Appropriate goals for most adults are to make ½ of your plate non-starchy vegetables and to consume about 1/3 cup of legumes each day or 2 cups per week. These two additions to your diet can help regulate weight, reduce cholesterol, and maintain healthy blood sugar levels.

If these recommendations do not sound attainable for you, don’t fret. Remember that when thinking preventatively, making small, sustainable changes you can maintain for 30 to 50 years can make a big difference. Here are a few ideas to get you started. To increase consumption of legumes, try roasted chickpeas for a crunchy snack or as croutons on a salad. Try adding cooked lentils in place of half of the hamburger for taco night. Bean or chickpea hummus can be used for dips, sandwiches, and in place of mayo in tuna salad. To increase your intake of non-starchy vegetables try adding roasted vegetables to pasta dishes, spinach to smoothies, and cucumbers/lettuce/tomatoes to your sandwich.

Happy eating!
- Lillie Hawkins

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The Heart of Healthcare in the Mission Valley