

TheBeat

 VCU Pauley Heart Center

A PUBLICATION OF
THE VCU PAULEY HEART CENTER
AT VCU MEDICAL CENTER

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Expanding the Footprint: VCU in Your Neighborhood

Although she just moved here last fall from the West Coast, Dr. Phoebe Ashley quickly learned something about her patients at MCV Physicians at Ridgefield: They really like the office's convenience.

Continued >>>

▶ ▶ ▶ **“Many of our patients are quite elderly, and being able to travel to a nearby location, with easy parking, is very appealing to them,” says Dr. Ashley, a cardiologist and former medical director of the Oregon Heart and Vascular Institute’s Cardiovascular Wellness and Rehabilitation Center and the St. Peter’s Rehabilitation Center in the state of Washington.**



Located in an attractive brick building in Richmond’s West End, MCV Physicians at Ridgefield is close to many neighborhoods and assisted living communities. The suburban cardiology practice, which opened in August 2014, is the latest venture by the VCU Pauley Heart Center to expand its physical presence beyond the parameters of downtown to areas where many of its patients live.

In addition to Ridgefield, the heart center offers outreach cardiology services at Stony Point, Williamsburg and South Hill, says Jalana McCasland, vice president of Ambulatory Services for VCU Medical Center. The first standalone facility, Stony Point, opened in October 1993. “We have about 4,546 adult cardiology patient visits each year at our outreach centers—and that number is growing,” she says.

At these facilities, “We can do some diagnostic testing; we can see them as outpatients. Of course, when they need a more advanced diagnostic or therapeutic procedure, downtown is the place to come,” says Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, chair of the Cardiology Division at VCU. “But we can at least make being seen by a VCU physician easier.”

At Ridgefield, Dr. Ashley and cardiologist Dr. Roshanak Markley provide consultations to their adult patients as well as testing with 3-D-capable echocardiograms and Holter monitoring. (Four highly regarded pediatric cardiologists, Dr. Doug Allen, Dr. Kerri Carter, Dr. Scott Gullquist and Dr. William Moskowitz, of Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU, also offer office hours at the practice.)

“The number one thing that patients love about this practice is that we spend a lot of time with them,” says Dr. Markley.

In addition to convenience, “The number one thing that patients love about this practice is that we spend a lot of time with them,” says Dr. Markley. “I think a lot of the time heart disease can be a complex problem. And if you really want to help your patients change their behavior to prevent heart disease you have to spend time with them and get to know them at a personal level.”

Originally from Tehran, Dr. Markley received her medical degree at the Medical

College of Georgia, served her internship and residency in internal medicine at VCU and completed her fellowship in cardiovascular medicine at Vanderbilt University.

Dr. Ashley, a Eureka, California, native, received her M.D. from the Medical College of Wisconsin, where she also conducted her internal medicine residency. She completed her cardiovascular fellowship at University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center.

“Dr. Ashley is an exceptionally good cardiologist, whose interests include women and cardiology, prevention of heart disease, and exercise. She is a very holistic cardiologist,” says Dr. Ellenbogen. “Dr. Markley is an excellent clinical cardiologist, with special interests in imaging and prevention of heart disease.” He adds, “Patients love both of them; they’re just wonderful doctors.”

Lori Edwards sits on an examining room table at the Ridgefield office, dressed in stylish athletic clothing and tennis shoes. At 44, the school clinic assistant is the picture of health. But then she pulls out her iPhone and, gliding her finger over the screen, reveals another picture of herself from last December, in a hospital bed.

“It happened the Saturday before Christmas,” she says. “I was just driving down the interstate with my 9-year-old and two dogs in the car.” Then, without warning, “I went into cardiac arrest and wrecked the car.”

Edwards had a blood clot in her heart artery that led to an ST-elevation myocardial infarction—a dangerous heart attack known as a STEMI. “Because of the clot, my heart was beating about 200 beats per minute and that’s what caused me to pass out.”

She adds, “I had a little bit of high cholesterol, not terrible, my total cholesterol was 190. I had never smoked. But my father passed away at 59 from cardiac arrest, a heart attack, and my brother passed away at 41 from a heart attack.”

Fortunately, her family was not injured in the wreck, and Edwards received CPR and AED treatment from several people who stopped to help. After receiving initial treatment at Sentara Williamsburg Regional

Medical Center, she was flown by helicopter to VCU Medical Center, where she remained for 18 days.

Dr. Markley, who was assigned to her case, visited or called to check in on her every day, says Edwards. “I felt very confident with her. She took great care of me.”

The doctor helped Edwards make necessary changes in her life, following her discharge—including cardiac rehabilitation, stress reduction and the movement toward a low-sodium, more plant-based diet. The mother of two also takes medication and wears an external defibrillator known as a Life Vest. When she first came home from the hospital, she could barely walk to the mailbox. Now, she can walk 1 ½ miles.

“And if you really want to help your patients change their behavior to prevent heart disease you have to spend time with them and get to know them at a personal level.”

“Since December, she has been making great progress,” says Dr. Markley. “She has had a remarkable attitude and has been a source of inspiration to people who know her.”

Today, at Edwards’ three-month check-up, her echo shows significant improvement, particularly with her ejection fraction—the amount of blood pumped out by the heart. “I left the hospital at 30 percent and today’s echo showed close to a 45% ejection fraction,” she says. “I feel great.”

Dr. Markley’s commitment to her patients is no surprise to Dr. Antonio Abbate, vice-chairman, Division of Cardiology at VCU, who served as her mentor during her residency. “I have known Roshi for many years. She was one of the brightest trainees I have ever had. Her enthusiasm for medicine is exceptional— and contagious,” he says. “She is the doctor that everyone would want to have: knowledgeable, caring and passionate.”

Downtown, the phones ring nearly nonstop in the reception area for the Noninvasive Cardiology Laboratories. The chairs are filled with patients awaiting appointments. It’s a big change from the calm at Ridgefield—but Dr. Ashley enjoys coming



New South Hill Hospital Planned

COVER: DR. ROSHANAK MARKLEY AND DR. PHOEBE ASHLEY / OPPOSITE PAGE: DR. ASHLEY IN THE NEW RIDGEFIELD OFFICE. / ABOVE: DR. MARKLEY'S PATIENT LORI EDWARDS RECEIVES GOOD NEWS ON HER ECHO; LAST DECEMBER, SHE WENT INTO CARDIAC ARREST WHILE DRIVING.

down here. Like Dr. Markley, she visits the main campus at least once a week to read studies, see inpatients and, as she puts it, “to stay on top of things.”

“It’s important to not be an isolated outpatient cardiologist. I have a whole group of colleagues who I can call upon to say, ‘You know, what about this? What would you do for this?’ It’s really nice to have that,” she says.

Dr. Ashley is sitting in an office with several other cardiologists. On her computer screen is a moving black-and-white image of a beating heart. This full-study echo—involving about 80-120 images—was taken during a patient’s stress test. With her computer mouse, she clicks through the images, occasionally freezing the screen to take a measurement. With the echo’s 3-D capability, she is able to move around the heart, to see it from many angles.

With the study, “We’re looking at the overall function of the heart, the ejection fraction, the thickness of the ventricular wall, all of the chamber sizes, all the valves—their structure and function, the great vessels and the pericardium, the sac that holds the heart. And we’re also getting an estimate of the pressure within the lungs.”

On busy days, she and another cardiologist may read 50-60 of these studies, involving a great variety of cases.

At Ridgefield, Dr. Ashley enjoys getting referrals for complicated cases—patients with atypical chest pain, for instance. “I like diagnostic dilemmas, so I think I get some of the patients who are a little more challenging sometimes.”

Although she is new to VCU, she has already gained the respect of her co-workers. “Dr. Ashley is a wonderful colleague. She is eager to help, approachable and consistently pleasant,” says Dr. Hem Bhardwaj, director of Cardiology

Consultation Services for VCU. “She is an outstanding physician who is thorough, detail-oriented and dedicated to achieving optimal outcomes for her patients. She is a charismatic educator and role model—a terrific addition to our cardiology team.”

Dr. Ashley, a dedicated volunteer with the American Heart Association out west, plans to get more involved with community education here. “I really think education is critical to the success of what we do,” she says. “People are not just a heart and blood vessels—they are a whole being. And each of the different organ systems impacts the cardiovascular system. I think you have to look at an individual holistically and try to optimize each of those things.”

More expansions are in the works for Ridgefield and other neighborhood clinics, says McClasland, VCU’s vice president of Ambulatory Services. VCU hopes to add an evening clinic at Ridgefield, and possibly add new services such as stress tests, electrophysiology testing and device management.

The Pauley Heart Center is also looking to expand its offerings in South Hill and Stony Point, and open a new office in Emporia. “We are currently looking at sites there now,” she says. The office will specialize in the care of heart failure patients. As with all the clinics, “We are trying to work as a partner with local physicians to supplement the services that are already in the communities.”

The notion of a hospital being in one location is changing, says Dr. Ellenbogen. “The best places in the world, places like [Johns] Hopkins, realized that you can’t just have one hospital in downtown Baltimore, you have to be able to branch out, and that’s what we’re doing. We’re bringing world-class medicine, world-class cardiovascular specialists to your neighborhood.” ●

Last June, VCU Health System welcomed a new member to its family, Community Memorial Healthcenter—now known as VCU Community Memorial Hospital. As a result of the merger with the South Hill hospital, the construction of a new facility is in the works.

“We are currently reviewing design proposals for a new hospital and expect to make a final decision very soon,” says Scott Burnette, CEO of VCU Community Memorial Hospital. “The goal is to develop a modern and efficient hospital that will be a source of pride for the region while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a future comprehensive medical complex on the site to even further enhance the entire patient experience.”

VCU Community Memorial serves communities in southern Virginia and northern North Carolina and is licensed for 99 acute care and 161 long-term care beds. VCU will commit a minimum of \$75 million toward strategic investments in the new hospital, which is expected to be completed in about three years. The hospital will include a permanent, on-site cardiac catheterization lab. It is currently served by a mobile cath lab that arrives once a week.

“Cardiology will be a big focus of the expansion,” says VCU cardiologist Dr. Bethany Denlinger, medical director of the Echocardiology Lab at VCU Community Memorial Hospital. For 19 years, she has traveled to the South Hill hospital to provide outreach services. Cardiologist Dr. George Vetrovec and electrophysiologist Dr. Jay Koneru have added their support in recent years. VCU plans to hire two new cardiologists for the venture, to start in August.

“They will be primarily South Hill-based cardiologists but will spend one day a week each at VCU,” says Dr. Vetrovec, director of the VCU Adult Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. In addition to their work at the hospitals, the new doctors will also visit primary care offices in areas outside of South Hill. “For the elderly patients, and those in rural areas, this is a real service.”

Meet Ellie Whelan, Teen and Heart Patient

In November 2013, young actress Ellie Whelan was performing in front of a packed auditorium at Appomattox Regional Governor's School for the Arts and Technology when she collapsed onstage. Audience members thought it was part of the act; then she didn't get up. At the age of 16, she had suffered a cardiac arrest.

The school nurse performed chest compressions while a teacher gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Despite their interventions, she still lost her pulse. Paramedics, then her father, arrived.

"I stepped through the door as they're beginning to shock her," recalls her father, Jim Whelan. "They shocked her three times in front of me." Her mother, meanwhile, was unaware of the situation unfolding.

An ambulance took her to Southside Regional Medical Center, where, because of the direness of the situation, she was packed in ice as part of the ARCTIC protocol. The treatment involves cooling the body to prevent further cell death. Then she was airlifted to VCU Medical Center.

"I spent two days in an induced coma," says Ellie Whelan. "I didn't have any brain waves. My parents were pretty certain that it was the end for me, but my doctors really stayed calm and collected, and they were really comforting to my parents. I really don't think that they would have been able to get through it without people like Dr. [Mary Ann] Peberdy," the director of the ARCTIC program.

Once she emerged from her coma, she underwent extensive physical and genetic testing. The tests determined that her erratic heartbeat was caused by a gene mutation in the cells around her heart. VCU Director of Cardiology Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen worked with a Mayo Clinic geneticist to determine



ELLIE WHELAN, A TEENAGED CARDIAC ARREST SURVIVOR, EMBRACES PERFORMING AND LIFE.

the best pharmaceutical course for her condition. She also received an implantable cardiac defibrillator (ICD).

A year and a half after her traumatic experience, Whelan is now a junior at Appomattox, still involved in musical theater. She also teaches cotillion at the Richmond Women's Club. "I was really worried that I wasn't going to be able to do stuff like that again, and that's really scary because that's what I've been doing forever, that's my passion," she says.

Her brush with death "has really put a lot of things into perspective. I think that probably for the first time since I was really little, I'm comfortable in my own skin. I'm really happy with who I am. And when I'm not happy, I'm not scared to change it anymore," she says, noting that she even has a new short haircut, something she has always wanted to try.

Encouraged by her friends, she now shares her story with others. She spoke at the American Heart Association's "Bollywood

Goes Red" gala at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in February and is also part of an ad campaign for VCU Medical Center.

Audiences connect with her "because she's smart, she's warm, she's funny, she has a lot of insight into people and the human condition, and she says what she feels," says Dr. Ellenbogen. "She's just an amazing human being."

Whelan, who had some warning signs before her arrest, says that a previous doctor didn't take her concerns seriously enough because she is a teenager. "I think it's really important to get the word out, that heart problems aren't just for people who are older; they can happen to anybody," she says. ●

There's more to the story:

To hear more of her story, please watch "Meet Ellie Whelan, Heart Patient" on vcuphc-thebeat.org.

VCU Completes 100th TAVR!

Congratulations to cardiologist Dr. Zachary Gertz and cardiac surgeon Dr. Gabor Bagameri and their team for performing VCU's 100th transcatheter aortic valve replacement in March. Only a few other sites in the region have achieved this landmark.

"We are very proud of our excellent results and ability to bring this and other new therapies for valvular heart disease that do not require open chest surgery. This has made a huge impact on our patients' lives and we look forward to leading the medical community in this area," says Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, chair of VCU Division of Cardiology.

According to Dr. Gertz, director of the VCU Structural Heart Disease program, "Every case has one cardiologist and one surgeon and we work together." The team has also started doing the procedure with conscious sedation, instead of with general anesthesia or a breathing tube. "It leads to faster recovery times. We do more of this than any other program in the state." ●



In Memory

In recent months, the Pauley Heart Center has lost several special friends. These individuals have made great contributions to the life of our center, the impact of which will be felt for many years to come.

Businessman and devoted community philanthropist Charles Thalhimer died on September 2. His support to VCU included the Pauley Heart Center, the School of the Arts, the School of Medicine, the Massey Cancer Center and the School of Business. For the latter, he established the Thalhimer Family Endowment Fund, among the largest endowments in the VCU School of Business.

He served as co-chair of two large Pauley Heart Center campaigns. “He was very enthusiastic and worked tirelessly. Whenever you asked him to do something, he took it on with great vigor and always had ideas about people to involve. He was a very, very positive individual who was committed to doing good things,” says Dr. George Vetrovec, director of VCU Adult Catheterization Laboratory.

VCU lost another dear friend, John B. “Jack” Russell, who passed away on January 14. He was an attorney whose work focused on medical malpractice defense. In one of his most significant trials, he defended heart transplant pioneer Dr. Richard Lower and other MCV faculty after the university’s first heart transplant when they were sued by the brother of the donor.

“His seminal defense resulted in the acceptance of brain death as a legal concept and paved the way for the growth of solid organ transplantation worldwide,” says Dr. Vigneshwar Kasirajan, chair of the Department of Surgery for VCU Medical Center. “The modern practice of transplantation resulted from his successful defense.”

In addition to his influential work in the courtroom, “Jack Russell was a delightful person who was very supportive of the heart center and the cardiology consortium,” says Dr. Vetrovec.

Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, chair of VCU Division of Cardiology, fondly remembers James C. Roberts, who died on March 8. “Jim Roberts cast a gigantic shadow. He was a tall man, and he would walk into a room and command everyone’s attention. He was a brilliant lawyer and had a way of talking that made everyone come to an agreement in a happy and comfortable fashion. He had a mind like a steel trap but was the always affable friendly Southern gentleman. He played a role in a number of landmark legal cases.”

He was also a tireless community volunteer. With his wife, Charlotte, “Jim was a huge supporter of the Pauley Heart Center and was critical in helping us get it started,” says Dr. Ellenbogen. The James C. Roberts, Esq., Professor of Cardiology was named in his honor. ●

Two New Cath Labs Unveiled

In March, two more labs opened their doors as part of a \$24 million renovation that VCU Pauley Heart Center began in 2013.

“They’re state-of-the-art labs aimed at providing the best quality imaging that’s available for both diagnosis and interventions,” says Dr. George Vetrovec, director of VCU’s Adult Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. The improved imaging enhances the safety of routine procedures, while also allowing the heart center to treat more high-risk patients in a cath lab setting, he says.

In the large, uncluttered labs, stainless steel cabinets hide supplies, and much of the equipment is mounted on ceiling booms—meaning, no power cords to trip over. Large flat-screen monitors hover near operating tables. Physicians can view, on multiple split screens, patient vitals, past scans, images from other diagnostic equipment and real-time fluoroscopy—all supported by monitors in an adjoining control room. The equipment and the room design reduce patient and staff radiation exposure to the lowest levels possible while providing exceptional images.

“Before, when we had patients with blockages in their legs, we really didn’t have optimal facilities in the cath lab to work with them.”

On the floors, pathways in different colors show where the equipment will move during a procedure. The paths are helpful to team members. “It tells them right away where they can safely stand,” says Ruth Williams, RN, nurse manager, Invasive Cardiology, Electrophysiology and Cardiovascular Procedural Care Unit.

The new environment combines the amenities of a cardiac catheterization lab with the sterile environment of an operating

room—allowing for more complex invasive interventions. Cath 1 is designed for the pediatric population with bright colors on the walls and other amenities. In the room, doctors can also perform diagnostic and interventional procedures in the peripheral veins and arteries of the body.

It also allows doctors to immediately convert from minimally invasive to open-heart procedures if necessary.

“Before, when we had patients with blockages in their legs, we really didn’t have optimal facilities in the cath lab to work with them. They had to have surgical interventions,” says Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, chair, VCU Division of Cardiology.

“Cath 2” includes an Innova IGS 520 system and Corindus Vascular Robotics, used for percutaneous cardiac interventions and the positioning of stents.

“Cath 3” and “Cath 4” are now undergoing renovations. Cath 4 will be a “hybrid” room featuring the Discovery IGS 630 system, which has a gantry with flexible positioning that is ideal for conducting procedures for structural heart disease. It also allows doctors to immediately convert from minimally invasive to open-heart procedures if necessary.

The heart center opened the first new lab in September 2013. When the entire project is completed, the Pauley Heart Center will have seven state-of-the-art GE labs to meet the increasing needs of its patients and enhance its ability to conduct new procedures in the long term.

As for research, “the labs will give us more tools to understand the physiology of the heart and will lead to more discoveries,” says Dr. Ellenbogen. ●



Discovery Series Event Focuses on Cardiology

At a recent MCV Discovery Series event, guests learned more about heart disease and the latest advances in cardiovascular research. Dr. Jerome F. Strauss III, dean of VCU School of Medicine, led a panel of VCU Pauley Center cardiologists. The event was held November 6 at Two Rivers Country Club in Williamsburg.

“The MCV Foundation launched the Discovery Series in November 2013 in Williamsburg to help increase the visibility of VCU Medical Center and highlight our many areas of excellence. The response has been very positive. During the past year, the Foundation hosted four events and provided the guests with immediate access to the exciting work of our scholars, researchers and clinicians who are truly

medical experts in their fields. In many cases, they wrote the books,” says Brian Thomas, interim president, MCV Foundation.

On the panel, Dr. Antonio Abbate spoke about the causes of heart attacks, the connection between inflammation and heart failure, and his clinical research on these subjects. Dr. George Vetrovec shared information about coronary artery disease and explained why people have heart attacks. Dr. Jordana Kron focused her talk on women and heart disease. Finally, Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen spoke about advances in the electrical management of heart disease. After the event, guests had the opportunity for one-on-one discussions with the physicians at a strolling reception.

Dotty and Bill Healy of Williamsburg were among those attending the event. “The evening was extremely well-executed,” says Mr. Healy, who was impressed by the caliber of

the speakers at the event. “The audience came away happy and informed. The doctors went the extra nine yards to provide a lot of needed bedside education.”

The Healys were inspired to make a significant gift to Pauley Heart Center to support cardiovascular research.

“I’m just absolutely delighted by their generosity and their support of Pauley Heart Center,” says Dr. Ellenbogen, chair of VCU Division of Cardiology. “Donations like this make a huge difference and really allow us to do groundbreaking research.” ●

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ABOVE LEFT: DR. KENNETH ELLENBOGEN SPEAKING WITH GUESTS. / ABOVE RIGHT: DR. JORDANA KRON AND DR. GEORGE VETROVEC SHARING INFORMATION DURING THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE AND WHY PEOPLE HAVE HEART ATTACKS.

Leading the Way in Research

Dr. Keyur Shah is the principal investigator for two exciting studies, ATTR-ACT and Endeavor. “We are the only center in Virginia engaged in these trials,” says Dr. Shah, medical director of VCU’s Mechanical Circulatory Support Program. The stage III clinical trials involve the use of the drugs tafamidis and AALN-TTRSC for the treatment of hereditary cardiac amyloidosis.

Cardiac amyloidosis is caused by deposits of an abnormal protein in the heart tissue. Over time, the accumulation of these proteins can lead to heart failure. Dr. Shah’s studies will be targeted to identifying and treating those with a mutation of the transthyretin [TTR] gene, linked to the condition.

“It’s hereditary, and we think it’s one of the major causes for racial discrepancies in heart failure outcomes,” says Dr. Shah, noting that African-Americans are disproportionately affected by amyloid-related heart failure in the U.S. With the Endeavor and ATTR-ACT trials now beginning, “We can offer medical therapy for a disease that previously required heart and liver transplantation.”

He is also heading a third trial, Discovery, which will involve identifying those who may have the condition as a result of a TTR mutation. The study will provide free genetic testing to patients.

Dr. Zachary Gertz is VCU’s principal investigator for a national study on the Parachute Ventricular Partitioning Device, which may help in the treatment of heart failure. As the name implies, the device opens like a parachute and “excludes the non-functioning part of the heart, concentrating the blood in the areas of the heart where the muscle is still squeezing well,” says Dr. Gertz, director of the VCU Structural Heart Disease program.

With the Endeavor and ATTR-ACT trials now beginning, “We can offer medical therapy for a disease that previously required heart and liver transplantation.”

The device is being tested on heart attack survivors who are suffering from heart failure. Placing the device does not require open heart surgery—it’s done under conscious sedation in the catheterization lab. To date, Dr. Gertz, one of the top implanters in the country, has

inserted five of the devices in patients. “They appear to be working pretty well, but that is just my anecdotal experience. We will not really know if the device works until the trial is complete.” He hopes that the parachute will improve the overall function of the heart for those suffering from heart failure. Patients will be followed in the trial for up to five years.

Dr. Antonio Abbate and Dr. George Vetrovec are leading a stage III clinical trial at VCU on the Odyssey, an injectable drug created by Sanofi U.S. Services Inc. and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. The drug is aimed at patients with high cholesterol that cannot be sufficiently controlled by a lipid-modifying or “statins” therapy.

“This is a new agent that has incredible power for lowering LDL cholesterol—the bad cholesterol. It has significant benefits, particularly for people who can’t take the stats, which are considered the gold standard for lowering cholesterol,” says Dr. Vetrovec, director of VCU Adult Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. “Time will tell whether Odyssey will have better outcomes than the standard therapy. So far, it’s been very powerful and very effective.” ●

Welcome, New and Returning Faculty!



DR. THOMAS YEH, JR.

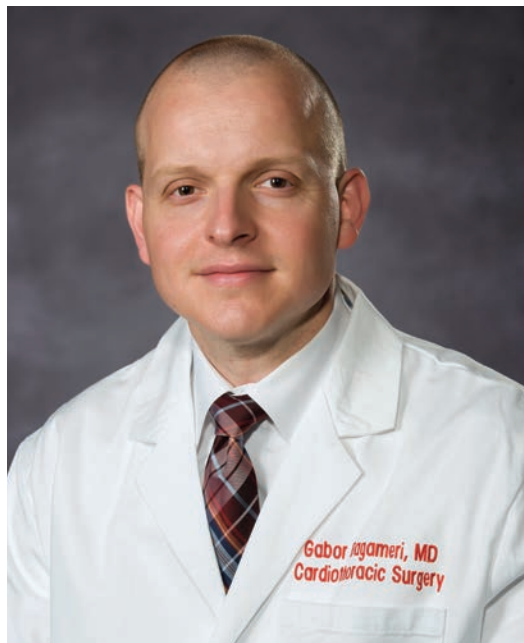
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU (CHoR) has a new chief of Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgery—Dr. Thomas Yeh, Jr. Dr. Yeh has also been named director of the Children's Hospital Foundation Heart Center at CHoR.

Dr. Yeh, who joined the faculty on October 1, was previously affiliated with Pediatric Heart Center, Tulane University Hospital and Clinic. After receiving his M.D. from Johns Hopkins University, he completed his Ph.D. and general surgery and cardiothoracic surgery residencies at VCU Medical Center, then completed a pediatric cardiothoracic surgery fellowship at the Hospital for Sick Children, University of Toronto.

“Dr. Yeh is a nationally renowned congenital heart surgeon who has extensive experience in all aspects of surgery for children with heart conditions. His recruitment was an important milestone and due to close collaboration between Children's Hospital Foundation and VCU Medical Center,” says Dr. Vigneshwar Kasirajan, chair of the VCU Department of Surgery. “He will raise the quality of care delivered to children in Virginia and make CHoR an important destination for complex cardiovascular care.”

In December, CHoR received a \$28 million gift from Children's Hospital Foundation, the single largest gift to pediatric health care in VCU's history, to establish the Children's Hospital Foundation Heart Center at CHoR. VCU Medical Center has supplemented the gift with a \$14 million commitment toward equipment and operations.

“I was at VCU for 13 years during my medical training, and I've always wanted VCU to have a strong congenital heart program. So when the Children's Hospital Foundation, VCU and CHoR came together to envision a world-class pediatric heart program, and offered me a



DR. GABOR BAGAMERI

chance to get back to my alma mater, I couldn't resist,” says Dr. Yeh.

He is pleased to return to VCU. “It has always been a dynamic and exciting environment,” he says. “There is great nursing here, great doctors, eager beaver medical students and residents, and a fantastic infrastructure in terms of the labs, radiology, all the kinds of high-tech bells and whistles that you would like a great medical center to have.”

He adds that “I'm humbled by the incredible support of Children's Hospital Foundation and VCU Medical Center. It is an honor to provide cardiac care to children and families in Central Virginia and to give back to one of the institutions that was so fundamental to my training.”



In January, cardiothoracic surgeon **Dr. Gabor Bagameri** returned from a 3 ½-month deployment with the U.S. Army Green Berets in Afghanistan. “I went as a general surgeon with a forward surgical team in the Afghan mountains in a remote special forces camp,” he says.

Originally from Hungary, Dr. Bagameri joined the reserve in 2010 and made a six-year commitment in exchange for U.S. citizenship. He joined the VCU faculty last June and was deployed in September.

“I am happy to be back with my family and the work I really enjoy. After being deployed and in harm's way, I appreciate the small gifts and pleasures life has to offer and not taking every-

thing for granted,” he says. “I have the utmost respect for U.S. military members who are away from their families, fulfilling their missions at the highest standards and willing to sacrifice their lives without thinking about it twice.”

Now that Dr. Bagameri has returned, he is working in the structural heart program and also developing a new aortic disease program along with colleagues in vascular surgery, radiology, cardiology and genetics. “As a surgeon, he has unique skills in vascular and cardiac surgery, and is board-certified in both,” says Dr. Vigneshwar Kasirajan, chair of VCU Department of Surgery. As for his service, “We are very proud of his contributions to the armed forces and fully support him in this critical role.” ●

Heart Rhythm Society Honors Dr. Ellenbogen

Congratulations to Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, chair of the Division of Cardiology, who has been selected for the Distinguished Teacher Award by the Heart Rhythm Society, a leading international professional organization for those who work in the cardiac arrhythmia field. The award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated outstanding skills as a teacher in electrophysiology and/or cardiac pacing.

“During his almost 30 years at MCV, dozens of fellows have benefited directly from his instruction, but his influence is much wider; he is an internationally recognized leader in fellow education, participating in and chairing dozens of fellow-training seminars. In addition, he is in the top echelon of highly sought speakers at national and international symposia for audiences of academic and practicing electrophysiologists,” says Dr. John M. Miller, professor of medicine at the Indiana University School of Medicine, in his nomination.

Dr. Ellenbogen, who also serves on the society's Board Review Course, received the prestigious award in May at the organization's annual meeting. ●



DR. KENNETH A. ELLENBOGEN

The Beat is a publication of the VCU Pauley Heart Center at VCU Medical Center.

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Friends and Supporters,

Saving a teenager with a rare genetic heart defect, welcoming new practitioners, celebrating 100 TAVRs, continuing leading-edge research and growing our practice have marked the prior six months. In this issue of *The Beat*, we share about these achievements.

You'll read about our expansion and growth to new locations with new providers who bring extensive knowledge to our clinical and research programs. Access and outreach are core values for us, and because of that, this expansion to outlying clinics engages more people in Central Virginia and aids us in our ability to build relationships with community practitioners. These community relationships are central to our mission as an academic center.

Inside you will also read about our basic, clinical and translational science. Much of what we are doing is only happening in Virginia at VCU, and we are proud of that. From heart failure to valve disease, cardiac cath to electrophysiology and cardiac surgery, we are steadfast in our commitment to developing and delivering the latest science and interventions for our patients. Those of you who support us make this continued progress possible, and for that we are so grateful.

On behalf of Dr. Vig Kasirajan in Cardiac Surgery and our teams of cardiologists and cardiac surgeons, please enjoy this issue of *The Beat*, and thank you for your continued and steadfast support.

WARMEST REGARDS,

Kenneth A. Ellenbogen, M.D.

Chairman, Division of Cardiology

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