

Vital Signs



Above and Beyond

THE KAWEAH HEALTH TRAUMA UNIT AND HELIPAD
ARE HELPING SAVE LIVES.

Vital Signs

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ON THE COVER

The Kaweah Health Trauma team, L-R: Amanda Davidson, Trauma Registrar; Kirk Marshall, RN, Trauma Department; Franklin Martin, Director of the Kaweah Health Trauma Program, PI Coordinator; Valentina Palomo (back), Trauma Registrar; Kathy Milanesio, Trauma Admin Assistant; Laura Stolle, Trauma Registrar; Dave Sanbongi, RN, EMS Coordinator, Disaster Manager; and (not pictured) Julie Barnes, Trauma Registrar, CAISS.

LETTER FROM THE CEO

At Kaweah Health, we are proud to provide the best care possible to our community despite the difficult financial times hospitals are facing, driven largely by an unprecedented staffing shortage and record-setting inflation. It is inspiring and encouraging to see our employees and physicians rise to the challenges with determination and resilience. As we enter a new fiscal year, I'd like to look back at the many achievements and important work we have accomplished.

We have taken many steps to reduce costs and increase revenue, all of which appear to be working. In the closing months of fiscal year 2023, which ended June 30, 2023, our efforts made us more cost effective and efficient, and we are optimistic that these efforts will continue pushing our budget back into the black in the coming months. Our ability to come together as an organization to solve new challenges is a testament to the unparalleled commitment and dedication of our leaders, staff, physicians, and advanced practice providers.

By my own accord, I have spent much time acting as one of the leading voices and proponents for the reforms needed to help hospitals across the state. I look forward to continuing this work, meeting with legislators to bring more funding and higher Medi-Cal reimbursement rates to hospitals and health care providers. I will continue to do television, radio, and newspaper interviews, all for the purpose of spreading this message and helping secure vital financial resources for Kaweah Health and all California hospitals, ensuring patient access to quality health care in their communities.

While we set our sights on improving the broader health care landscape in which we operate, we have made great strides to improve the quality of health care in our own community with our services, facilities, and partnerships. As a testament to this, Kaweah Health was recently named by Becker's Hospital Review as one of 153 great community hospitals serving large rural areas or smaller suburban communities in the United States. We were one of only three California hospitals to make the list, and the only one between San Jose and Los Angeles. It's truly inspiring to see the dedication of our employees being recognized on a national stage. Kaweah Health was specifically recognized for making significant strides in improving medical education, nursing programs, community outreach, and access to quality care. Our work to enhance quality health care in underserved areas through the GME and School of Nursing programs were cited, as well as our upcoming grant-funded child and adolescent health wing of our Mental Health Hospital on Akers Street.

More improvements include the new Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness on Noble Avenue in Visalia, which is hard at work providing individual, marriage, family, and child and adolescent therapy to the community. A new medical clinic in the Visalia Industrial Park of northwest Visalia is scheduled to open in September 2023, bringing needed access to services to the western edge of Visalia. Our partnerships with Stanford Health's cardiothoracic surgery program, USC's urology program, and the Cleveland Clinic's Heart, Vascular & Thoracic Institute, have bolstered the already-outstanding specialty care available to the area. Our long-standing partnership with Valley Children's Medical Group has elevated the level of pediatric care available in the area.

You can do a lot to support quality health care close to home by taking advantage of the great primary and specialty care, labs, and testing available locally. When you receive care at Kaweah Health, it is an investment in the community because we are here to serve the people of Tulare County, first and foremost. As we move into the new fiscal year, Kaweah Health will continue meeting the challenges we face, growing stronger and emerging a better organization.



Gary Herbst

Chief Executive Officer of
Kaweah Health

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Hope and Healing Here



▲ Playing games with patients allows psychotherapists like Maria Mendoza, LMFT, to build rapport and observe how children engage in problem solving.

Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness is helping the community one talk at a time.

In the face of unprecedented challenges brought on by the pandemic, mental health has emerged as a critical concern affecting countless individuals. Many people experienced isolation, uncertainty, and fear, which led to an increase in mental health issues nationwide. Having a comprehensive support system in place to assist people dealing with these difficulties is critical to having a healthy community. In response to this need, the Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness was opened, and on March 8, 2023 it began offering a variety of therapy services.

The center provides psychotherapy, also referred to as talk therapy, which refers to a variety of treatments that aim to help people identify and change troubling emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. The center offers vital services to all members of the community: individual and couples counseling, marriage and family

therapy, and child and adolescent therapy. Additionally, patients can take part in specialized therapy groups, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), and play therapy, among several other therapy modalities.

Psychotherapy takes place in a one-on-one setting with a mental health professional or in a group setting with other patients led by a psychotherapist. With flexible operating hours from Monday to Saturday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., the center can accommodate patients with busy schedules. This commitment to accessibility reflects the center's dedication to reaching as many people as possible and addressing the unique challenges faced by people from diverse backgrounds.

The Kaweah Health psychotherapy program is led by Gabriela Martinez, LMFT, who brings 20 years of experience in providing psychotherapy services to children, adults, and families. She has extensive experience working with victims of

abuse and trauma and has training in trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), play therapy, and art therapy. Central to the center's mission is its team of compassionate and highly skilled psychotherapists: Maria Mendoza, LMFT; Vanessa Gutierrez, AMFT; Julie Andress, AMFT; and Analis Lopez Gonzales, ASW. Their expertise enables them to provide talk therapy, which is aimed at improving symptoms, developing effective coping skills, and empowering individuals to reframe their thoughts. Through these methods, patients can begin to regain control over their lives, find healing, and facilitate the often-difficult work of mental health challenges.

The spectrum of conditions addressed by the Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness is broad, encompassing issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). By focusing on these prevalent mental health conditions, the center ensures it can cater to a wide range of needs, supporting patients through personalized and tailored care.

One important aspect of the center's outreach is its work with children and adolescents. Exiting the pandemic, the need for mental health services for children and adolescents has grown immensely. "Children experienced a lot of social isolation and unpredictability in their lives during the pandemic, and that's a critical time in their development," says Martinez. "There are a lot of children experiencing anxiety and depression as a result."

The center sees young individuals grappling with problems like bullying, anxiety, and depression. "One of the therapies we use with children is play therapy, where children can use toys as a symbolic representation of their feelings," says Martinez. "We sometimes will also play games as a means to develop bonds, reduce inhibition, or increase a child's confidence in sharing with their therapist."

One positive development noted by Martinez is the increasing openness of individuals in seeking therapy. Amid the pandemic as people were quarantined and cut off from others, the stigma around mental health services gradually diminished. This positive shift in attitude, particularly among the Hispanic community, reflects a growing recognition of the importance of mental health care.

The pandemic's impact on mental health has been profound and far-reaching. According to various studies conducted during the pandemic, rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental



▲ Vanessa Gutierrez, AMFT, listens to a child explain her drawing.

▼ The Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness team: Front, L-R: Analis Lopez Gonzales, ASW; Gabriela Martinez, LMFT; Julie Andress, AMFT. Back, L-R: Maria Mendoza, LMFT; Jennifer Juarez, patient access specialist; and Vanessa Gutierrez, AMFT.



health conditions saw a significant surge. The increased demand for mental health services during these times underscored the necessity of facilities like the Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness.

As we navigate the path to recovery in the post-pandemic era, the significance of mental health services is clear. The Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness is proud to play a vital role in supporting people through their darkest moments, offering guidance, healing, and hope. By fostering an environment where seeking help is encouraged and stigma is diminished, the center can help pave the way for a healthier and more resilient community. KH

Learn more about Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness at KaweahHealth.org/MentalWellness.

To schedule an appointment call (559) 624-6875.

“

Children experienced a lot of social isolation and unpredictability in their lives during the pandemic, and that's a critical time in their development.

”

Gabriela Martinez, LMFT
on the pandemic's effect
on children

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Kaweah Health Cardiology Center is keeping hearts healthy in the community.



Every year, more than 5,500 cardiovascular procedures are performed inside Kaweah Health Medical Center's Cardiovascular Unit. With six catheterization laboratory rooms (cath labs) which includes one hybrid room, state-of-the-art imaging and monitoring technology assist doctors with a variety of cardiovascular procedures to treat coronary artery disease, peripheral artery disease, heart attacks, and more.

The key to many of these procedures is the cath lab, which is equipped with advanced imaging equipment and specialized instruments to perform minimally-invasive procedures known as catheterizations. These procedures are used to diagnose and treat various cardiovascular conditions.

A common type of procedure is cardiac catheterization. It involves inserting a long, thin tube, called a catheter, through an artery or vein in the leg or arm and into the heart. Cardiac

Patient Betsy Murphy is back on the tennis court three weeks after a minimally-invasive procedure to protect her from blood clots.



Visalia works with cardiology patients to promote heart health and provide ongoing evaluation and management of cardiovascular problems. The center provides diagnostic and therapeutic cardiology services and offers a wide range of cardiology sub-specialists from providers (alphabetically) David Cislowski, MD; Ankur Gupta, MD; Dennis Johnson, MD; Harry Lively, MD; Sarmad Said, MD; and Atul Singla, MD.

Patient Betsy Murphy is one of the many people across the country with non-valvular atrial fibrillation (AFib). “I’ve been living with AFib for 17 years, and I’m 76 now, so I am definitely at risk for blood clots,” she says. An estimated seven million Americans are affected by AFib, an irregular heartbeat that can feel like a quivering heart. People with AFib have a five times greater risk of stroke than those with normal heart rhythms.

— “ —

After the surgery, I felt fine, and there was no discomfort at all.

— ” —

Betsy Murphy
on her WATCHMAN FLX procedure

Fortunately, a procedure with high positive outcomes was available to Betsy, and in July 2023, a specialized cardiac team at Kaweah Health Medical Center performed a surgery that will dramatically reduce Betsy’s risk of having blood clots enter her bloodstream. The procedure involved a minimally-invasive insertion of the WATCHMAN FLX™ left atrial appendage closure device. The device prevents stroke in patients with AFib, which affects the heart’s ability to pump blood normally. Kaweah Health is the first hospital in the area to offer the WATCHMAN device and is excited to offer it as an alternative to the lifelong use of blood thinners for people with non-valvular AFib.

The procedure uses the hybrid cath lab and requires both the cath lab and open-heart teams to perform. The device

90%

of stroke-causing clots that come from the heart are formed in the left atrial appendage (LAA).

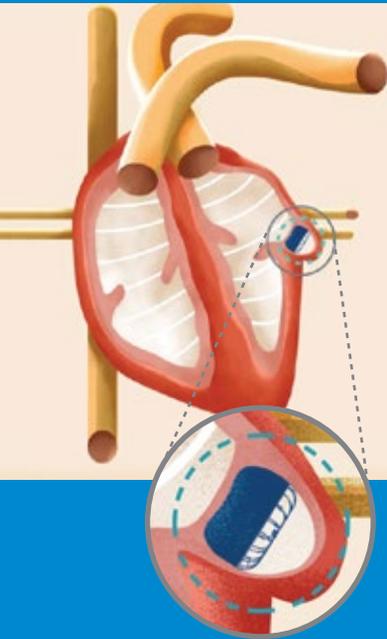


For people with AFib, the LAA can be a source for dangerous blood clots. The WATCHMAN FLX™ device closes the LAA and greatly reduces the risk of stroke.

catheterization can be used for a variety of purposes such as evaluating problems or inserting medical devices in the heart and arteries. These procedures are referred to as minimally-invasive because they can address problems with the heart and arteries without large and often complicated surgeries. Additionally, they offer patients the benefits of shorter hospital stays, faster recovery, and lower infection risk.

Outside of the medical center, the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center on Akers Street in

According to the American Heart Association, a person with AFib is five times more likely to suffer a stroke than someone with a regular heartbeat.



The WATCHMAN device seals off the LAA and keeps blood clots formed there from entering the bloodstream.

used is a one-time implant about the size of a quarter. It sits inside the heart's left atrial appendage (LAA) where blood clots often occur. The device creates a barrier to prevent blood clots from escaping into the bloodstream and causing a stroke or other adverse conditions. Betsy's procedure was performed by Dr. Singla and Dr. Gupta, plus a specialized team of medical professionals. The roughly hour-long procedure was a success and Betsy was back at home the next day. "After the surgery, I felt fine, and there was no discomfort at all," Betsy says of the procedure. "I really want to stress how impressed I was with the professionalism of the entire team," she adds. "After the surgery too, and through the shift changes, everyone was very considerate and concerned with how I was doing. They made sure I was comfortable."

It takes a team of highly trained specialists to perform any heart surgery, and Betsy's procedure was no exception. The entire team consisted of Atul Singla, MD; Ankur Gupta, MD; Bradlee Bachar, MD, Cardiac Anesthesiologist; Tony Zapata, Cardiac Sonographer; Lanette Badhan, RN-NP for Cardiac Cath Lab; Evelyn Acevedo, RN for Cardiac Cath Lab; Leticia Cerna, Cath Lab Tech II; and Oscar Barcenas, Cath Lab Tech II.

Dr. Singla is quick to point out that a procedure like this takes a very

specialized team, "Everyone on the cath lab team is incredible, very skilled," he says. "The pre- and postoperative care teams are also very important, and they are excellent as well."

Each team member plays a vital part in a successful procedure. Dr. Bachar is a cardiac anesthesiologist who is certified in transesophageal echocardiography, or TEE. "For a procedure like this, there needs to be continuous ultrasound of the heart to help guide the device to the precise location," Dr. Bachar explains. "In a sense, I'm like the navigator, helping the other doctors guide the device to the correct location, making sure it's seated properly, and collecting and communicating data throughout."

Dr. Singla is excited about being able to offer this procedure to patients in the Central Valley. "This is going to make a big difference in the lives of patients with non-valvular AFib who are unable to take blood thinners due to various reasons and are at risk for stroke," says Dr. Singla. "WATCHMAN therapy is an alternative to oral anticoagulation, and this is a particularly attractive option for patients at high risk for bleeding." ^{KA}

Learn more about WATCHMAN and other non-invasive cardiac procedures at [KaweahHealth.org/Cardiac](https://www.KaweahHealth.org/Cardiac).



Kaweah Health's highly-skilled and specialized team performed the first WATCHMAN FLX procedure in Tulare and Kings Counties. L-R: Dr. Ankur Gupta, Interventional Cardiologist; Dr. Atul Singla, Interventional Cardiologist; Tony Zapata, Cardiac Sonographer; Lanette Badhan, RN, NP for Cardiac Cath Lab; Dr. Bradlee Bachar, Cardiac Anesthesiologist; Evelyn Acevedo, RN for Cardiac Cath Lab; Christian Dose, Boston Scientific representative; Leticia Cerna, Cath Lab Tech II; Patrick Massetti, Boston Scientific representative; and Oscar Barcenas, Cath Lab Tech II.



Saving Lives: It's in Your Hands

Outdoor event brings life-saving skills to the public.

On June 6, 2023, Kaweah Health hosted a sidewalk CPR event on a sunny morning in Visalia's Garden Street Plaza. The event drew a diverse crowd of locals interested to learn more about hands-only CPR from registered nurses. CPR stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, a life-saving technique used when the heart stops beating or beats too ineffectively to circulate blood to the brain and other vital organs. Director of Critical Care Services Shannon Cauthen helped organize the event and was on hand to help out where needed. "Events like this are important because you can reach people who might not otherwise learn how to save a life," she says.

Kaweah Health Director of Cardiovascular and Critical Care Services Shannon Cauthen created the event to raise awareness about CPR.



During the event, registered nurses guided participants through hands-only CPR training using special manikins. "It's an easy thing to learn, and it could save someone's life who's waiting for emergency medical services," Cauthen explains. "The manikins do a good job of simulating how hard you need to push," says Cauthen. "People are usually surprised how difficult it can be. You really need to lean into it with your body weight to do it right."

Community partner 106.7 KJUG Country radio was there, broadcasting live and keeping the atmosphere upbeat. The Kaweah Health team was excited to meet all of the people who stopped by, learned about, and practiced hands-only CPR.

The sidewalk CPR event empowered the community with life-saving knowledge, transforming ordinary individuals into potential heroes. It was a testament to the power of education, unity, and Kaweah Health's commitment to the community. **KH**

Learn more about hands-only CPR at KaweahHealth.org/HandsOnlyCPR.

▲ Kaweah Health Director of Community Engagement Deborah Volosin (left) and Oriana Gropetti of KJUG Country practice hands-only CPR at the downtown Visalia event.



American Heart Association®

The American Heart Association reports 73 percent of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests happen in homes or residences. Statistically speaking, if you need to do CPR in an emergency, you will most likely be trying to save the life of someone you love — a family member or friend.

Above and Beyond

The Kaweah Health Trauma Unit and helipad help patients in serious need.

When it comes to life-threatening injuries, quick access to trauma care is the most important factor in saving lives. So, in March 2011, Kaweah Health took the first steps to bring high-quality trauma care to Tulare County. That year, the board of directors of the Kaweah Health Foundation unanimously approved a \$2 million fundraising campaign, Minutes Matter, to fund a helipad at the medical center. Recognizing the vital service this would bring to the area, support immediately began to pour in from law enforcement, the medical community, civic organizations, Tulare County businesses, and Kaweah Health's employee donors. Within two years, the \$2 million goal had been reached.

Construction began in September 2012, and on June 3, 2013 the helipad officially began operations. Within days of completion, it was transporting patients to receive life-saving measures at Kaweah Health. Six months later, more than 100 life-saving flights had been launched, including a rescue from a remote area with no roads, just three miles from Mt. Whitney.

Since the helipad's inception, more than 2,600 patients have been transported to and from Kaweah Health Medical Center. The farthest trauma-response flight transported an injured patient from Interstate 5, just north of Kern County. The flight took just 23 minutes by air but would have been more than an hour by ambulance. The farthest flight out of Kaweah Health was to San Diego for



specialty care, a 2-hour helicopter flight that would have taken six hours by ground.

No one knows about the lifesaving capability of the helipad like Ray Wynn. Ray was in the middle of a relaxing afternoon on the golf course when a big swing left a stabbing pain in his back around 3 p.m. It left him not feeling well and a little disoriented, so he decided to go home. After some time at home, things were not improving, so he called his wife Liz. "He was in pain and not completely coherent, so I called an ambulance for him," Liz remembers. "A little while later, the hospital called and told me to come down right away and notify any direct family members, so I knew it was serious."

Director of the Kaweah Health Trauma Program Franklin Martin was the assistant manager of care at the time and remembers the incident well, "Mr. Wynn had a type A upper

“

I've been working here since before the helipad was built, so I know it's absolutely helping to save lives.

”

Dave Sanbongi
Kaweah Health RN,
EMS Coordinator,
Disaster Manager;
on the importance of
the helipad



The Golden Hour

In emergency trauma care, the golden hour refers to the crucial time period immediately after an injury. During this time, rapid treatment in an appropriate facility can provide the best possible outcome and minimize complications.

The helipad has helped transport countless people to life-saving care. L-R: Dave Sanbongi, Kaweah Health RN, EMS Coordinator, Disaster Manager; Brian Mendez, SkyLife Program Manager; Ben Barnett, SkyLife Flight Paramedic/Preceptor; Jill Anderson, SkyLife Lead Flight Nurse; Larry Santos, SkyLife Lead Pilot; and Justin Nomellini, Mercy Air Ambulance Flight Paramedic.

aortic dissection, which has about a 25 percent survival rate. The cardiothoracic surgeon on duty that night said Ray would need immediate surgery in order to fix it,” recalls Martin. “We stabilized his condition, controlled his blood pressure, and got him on an air ambulance to Stanford. He was there within an hour.” Looking back now, Wynn can’t believe how lucky he was. “If not for everyone helping me that day and air transport to Stanford, I probably wouldn’t be here today,” he says.

The Kaweah Health Trauma Program works in coordination with emergency medical services (EMS) to bring the highest level of

emergency trauma care possible at the only trauma center between Fresno and Bakersfield.

Dave Sanbongi, RN, is the EMS coordinator at Kaweah Health, where he oversees EMS and helipad operations. He has seen the impact of the helipad firsthand, “I’ve been working here since before the helipad was built, so I know it’s absolutely helping to save lives,” Dave says. “Before we built it, air ambulances had to land at the Visalia Municipal Airport, which added precious minutes to their transport. Now, they can be brought in or flown out in



— “
If not for everyone helping me that day and the quick ride to Stanford, I probably wouldn't be here today.
” —

Ray Wynn
on his emergency helicopter transport from Kaweah Health

▲
Ray Wynn is back on the golf course with wife Liz thanks to the quick actions of Kaweah Health's Trauma Unit and a timely helicopter transport.

the fastest way possible. We can move a patient from the helicopter and into hospital care in a matter of minutes.”

An air ambulance can be requested by EMS, fire, and law enforcement personnel as needed. Hospitals can also request it to transport critically ill or injured patients that require specialty care not available at their facility. Not all of the helicopter trips involve trauma patients though. More than half of them involve transporting patients from one hospital to another, reinforcing the critical role of the helipad in expanding access to specialized care. There are regular trips transporting patients to hospitals in the Bay Area, Sacramento, and Los Angeles.

Trauma care is a specialized field, and trauma surgeons, nurses, and others require trauma certification, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to trauma cases effectively. At the heart of Kaweah Health's trauma care is a robust and comprehensive program overseen by Franklin Martin. He ensures the trauma program meets the highest accreditation standards and participates in ongoing quality improvement. Additionally, Kaweah Health takes an active role in educating the community by providing targeted training based on the patterns and trends of injuries observed in the emergency department (ED). Schools, agricultural shows, and outdoor events serve as platforms for disseminating crucial information about trauma prevention and initial response.

Each year, Kaweah Health's trauma unit sees approximately 3,000 patients, a steady stream that continues throughout the year. Patients typically arrive through the ED, where the dedicated trauma team mobilizes to provide rapid assessment, stabilization, and treatment. It is no small endeavor and starts with the EMS team. Martin outlines the detailed process, “When EMS personnel encounter a trauma patient, they use pre-established protocols to determine if the patient meets criteria for transport to the nearest trauma center. They will provide immediate lifesaving measures and will then initiate rapid transport to the nearest trauma center. Once en route, they contact the trauma center via radio or cell phone. An ED registered nurse (RN) certified in EMS operations will then initiate an activation process to get the trauma team and all the necessary equipment to the bedside prior to the patient's arrival. The trauma team includes an ED attending physician, trauma surgeon, a respiratory therapist, ED RNs, ED pharmacist, ED tech, x-ray technician, lab technician, social worker, security, and chaplain.” In addition to the trauma team, there are neurosurgeons in the hospital 24-hours a day, should trauma patients need such specialty care. The ability to rapidly mobilize the trauma team ensures critically injured patients receive swift and comprehensive care.

Kaweah Health's trauma unit and helipad have addressed a significant gap in access to trauma care for critically injured individuals in the community and beyond the borders of Tulare County. Kaweah Health is honored to offer such care and is proud of the work of countless individuals who helped make the helipad a reality. **KH**



Wagging Tails, Happy Hearts

Therapy dog program is a bright spot in the day.

At Kaweah Health Volunteer Services, you'll find a group of kind-hearted people who are making a big impact. About 200 volunteers ranging in age from 15 to 89 work across 75 different services in the hospital every day, bringing comfort and support to patients and staff alike. In 2022, volunteers gave an incredible 35,000 hours of service, and in 2023, they are on track to surpass that total.

Although you will find many types of volunteers at Kaweah Health, perhaps the overwhelming favorite is the team of therapy dogs who bring comfort and a bright moment into the lives of patients and staff. Twice each month, a team of therapy dogs and their handlers visit Kaweah Health Medical Center, rotating through different departments each visit. It is a valuable addition to the healing process, as studies have consistently shown interacting with animals reduces anxiety, lowers blood pressure, and decreases pain perception.

Volunteer Coordinator Kelly Pierce is in charge of all volunteer programs, including pet

therapy. "The dogs really help patients with the healing process, and there are spiritual and emotional benefits as well," she explains. "Our employees really appreciate it too, because it's an important part in the self-care of healthcare workers."

The Kaweah Health Pet Therapy team members include Tana Bennett and Remi, Melody Camarillo and Bo, Rudy Roberts and Lolly, and Roberta Torres and Duffy. All of the dogs are registered therapy dogs with Pet Partners. Although therapy animals and service animals may seem similar, there is a big difference between the two. Therapy animals support people with a wide variety of needs, providing people with healing contact to improve their physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning. Although therapy animals receive extensive training and may interact with a variety of people, they are not considered service animals. Service

▲ Handler Tana Bennett (right) talks with patient care team members while Bo and Remi enjoy the attention.

L-R: Victoria Mull, Rehab Aide; Liliana Arrechea, Occupational Therapist III (back); Megan Weist, RN; and Marissa Santos Diaz, RN.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The presence of therapy dogs can often lead to increased social interactions among patients, helping to combat feelings of isolation during hospital stays.
- Therapy dogs are trained to sense emotions and can provide comfort and support to patients going through difficult times.

— “
I have two dogs at home and I really miss them. I think that’s actually the hardest part about being here.

— ”
Paul Quintana
on being away from his pets



▲ Jada Lindegren, CNA, takes a break with German shepherd Bo.

▼ Paul Quintana appreciates the visit from Remi while he is away from his own dogs.



animals are specialized, trained to do a specific task or tasks like picking up dropped objects for an individual with a disability.

Registered Nurse Megan Weist loves the break the canine visitors bring. “It’s such a nice diversion to see the dogs and get to visit with them,” she says. “Things can get stressful here, but the dogs are so calm and sweet. I feel really good after being with them.” Certified Nursing Assistant Jada Lindegren welcomes the surprise of seeing the therapy dogs. “Every time they come, I get so excited. Just giving them a hug really makes my day,” she says.

For the patients staying in the hospital, interacting with the pet therapy team is a hopeful, and often emotional moment. For patient Paul Quintana, Remi is a welcome visitor. “I have two dogs at home and I really miss them,” says Paul. “I think that’s actually the hardest part about being here.”

At Kaweah Health Medical Center, using pet therapy has proven to be a transformative and uplifting experience for both patients and staff members alike. With its many benefits, volunteer pet therapy has become an integral part of the hospital’s commitment to providing comprehensive and holistic care. [KH](#)

Learn more about joining the pet therapy team at [KawahHealth.org/Volunteer](https://www.kawahhealth.org/volunteer).

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**Kaweah Health
Foundation**

Shining Bright

Starlight Awards celebrate exceptional employees from 2022.



▲
Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst announces the outstanding employees recognized in 2022.

Whether caring for patients, compiling spreadsheets, or cleaning facilities, Kaweah Health believes that every team member is helping to save lives and improve the health and well-being of our community. At the 2023 Starlight Awards, Kaweah Health celebrated 12 months of standout employees and the employee of the year for 2022. All of them are individuals who have gone above and beyond to deliver world-class care.

2022 Employee of the Month Winners

January: Karina Gonzalez
Charge Nurse, 3 South

February: Michelle Phillips
GME Program Coordinator

March: Lakeia Green
Patient Access Specialist

April: Sonya Fajardo
CNA, 4 North

May: Minerva Aceves
LCSW/LMFT, Dialysis

June: Scott Ritchie
Laboratory Section Chief

July: Kim Thompson
Charge Nurse, Labor and Delivery

August: Valarie Domingo
Shipper Receiver, Central Logistics

September: Susanna Ehram
RN, 3 North

October: Robert Beckett
Technical Support Analyst, ISS

November: Danny Pavlovich
Occupational Therapist III

December: Evan Schmidt
RN, Rapid Response Team

Employee of the Year

Geraldine White, RN, CRRN

Rehabilitation PPS/Quality Improvement Coordinator
Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital

Employee of the Year winner Geraldine White was quite surprised when she found out she had won the honor. “I was backstage helping out, moving some chairs, and someone called me over to watch because they were getting ready to announce the winner,” she recalls. “When Gary Herbst (Kaweah Health CEO) announced my name, I thought I was hearing things. If I had known before, I probably would have gotten my hair done.”

Throughout her 23 years at Kaweah Health, Geraldine White has been greatly respected and appreciated by the entire staff at Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital. Her peers and supervisors recognize her as energetic and always looking for ways to improve things for both patients and employees. Above all, she is known as an advocate for patients, humbly and tirelessly serving them without the need for recognition. She often says, “We need to do this because it is the right thing to do for the patient.” Geraldine is an inspiration to her co-workers and the entire rehabilitation team. Congratulations Geraldine on your achievement!



Overall, more than 120 employees were recognized organization-wide for their outstanding achievements.



▲ Kaweah Health Board of Directors Vice President Lynn Havard Mirviss, RN, Ed.D, is accompanied by her son Dr. Robert Havard while accepting the Lifetime Achievement Award.

◀ L-R: Kaweah Health COO Jag Batth, Employee of the Year Geraldine White, Tulare County Supervisor Amy Shuklian, and Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst.

To see all of the award winners, visit [KaweahHealth.org/2023Awards](https://www.kaweahhealth.org/2023Awards).

Heartfelt Hero



Dr. Sarmad Said brings some of the area's best heart care to the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare.

Your heart is more than just a remarkable organ — it is the centerpiece of your body that keeps you alive and well. Keeping your heart healthy is vital to ensuring a long and fulfilling life, so having the best heart care available is equally as vital. The Tulare and Kings County regions of California are fortunate to have the expertise of Sarmad Said, MD, caring for patients at the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare. Dr. Said is a board-certified cardiologist who is also board-certified in nuclear medicine, echocardiography, and he is the only cardiologist in the area who is board-certified in cardiac CT scanning, which helps physicians detect disease and injury. His wide range of specialties allows him to provide comprehensive treatment plans tailored to his patients, addressing their unique needs, and ensuring the best outcomes. One of the most skilled cardiologists in the area, Dr. Said and his family are happy

to call Visalia home, and those who have been his patients are equally as happy he is here.

Diane MacDonald was experiencing lingering symptoms after a bout with Covid, which left her short of breath. When she noticed her heart rate jumping every time she took a shower, she started to think that something might be wrong. She was referred to Dr. Said, and following her first appointment, she completed a number of tests at the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare including an echocardiogram, chemical stress test, and calcium score. On Diane's follow-up visit, Dr. Said shared the news that Diane had some blockage in her heart's left anterior descending artery, which would require bypass surgery. Despite the difficult news, Diane was put at ease by Dr. Said and felt confident about her plan forward. "Dr. Said is very communicative and lays everything out step by step," she says. "He really takes the time to make sure you understand your condition and feel assured about your care plan."

The confidence instilled in Dr. Said's patients is the result of his approach to their care. "I try to meet my patients where they are — I want to actively involve them in the discussion and see what they know about their health," says Dr. Said. "By the time they leave here, they are fully informed, not only about what's going on now, but about the choices we're making and the plan going forward."

Dr. Said is making a difference in the heart health of Tulare and Kings County residents through his compassionate care and dedication to his field. Diane wholeheartedly agrees. "I'm a nurse, so I've worked with a lot of doctors, and Dr. Said is by far the best doctor I've ever met," she explains. "You can tell he cares about you by the way he treats you." After a successful



▲ Diane McDonald feels confident about the cardiac care she receives at the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare.

bypass surgery, Diane is grateful for all of the care she has received at the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare. "Dr. Said and his staff are so compassionate and amazing," she says. "I know they will take good care of me here."

Becoming a cardiologist is no small endeavor. Aspiring cardiologists spend 10-13 years in education and training after high school. They earn a bachelor's degree, typically in a science-related field, in the first four years. After that, they complete four years of medical school to earn their doctorate in medicine,

which may be via a Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree. They then complete three to seven years of residency training in internal medicine, followed by one to three years of fellowship training in cardiology. From there, some cardiologists choose to further subspecialize in areas such as electrophysiology, interventional cardiology, and advanced cardiac imaging.

Dr. Said started his journey to become a doctor in Germany in 1996 before arriving in the U.S. in 2012 to train as an internist in El Paso, Texas. In 2018, he finished his last fellowship and moved to Visalia with his wife and young family. He is excited to be part of such a strong community of talented cardiologists. "In the Tulare County region, there are about 20 cardiologists. For me, I see this personally as a challenge to improve myself and see where I am with my peers, but it's also an opportunity to learn from my peers," says Dr. Said.

Most of all, Dr. Said emphasizes that he and his team are always there to help patients. "Cardiology and health care can be challenging for patients," Dr. Said explains. "We do our best to accommodate the needs of patients, no matter what they are. I would like to reiterate that we're available for our patients to provide personal support. We really pride ourselves on that personal touch with our patients. We are always available by phone or email to answer their questions and address any concerns." KH

Learn more about Kaweah Health's cardiac services at KaweahHealth.org/Cardiac.

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By the time they leave here, they are fully informed, not only about what's going on now, but about the choices we're making and the plan going forward.
” —

Dr. Said
on his approach
to patient care



▲
Dr. Harjoth Malli is board-certified in sleep medicine and a passionate advocate for sleep health.

Sleep Matters

Kaweah Health Sleep Center is helping children and parents rest assured.

As Ella Russel, 10, made her way through elementary school, she started getting more and more tired throughout each day. Her mom, Danielle Mills, didn't think it was too unusual at first. Her daughter played hard and was active just like other kids. But when Ella started regularly falling asleep after school and her tonsils were becoming inflamed, mom thought it was time for a trip to the doctor. "She was just so tired every day," says Danielle. "It was unusual and out of her normal routine, so I made an appointment with her doctor."

Ella's doctor evaluated her for obstructive sleep apnea and found that Ella was snoring nightly and had enlarged tonsils. He referred her to the Kaweah Health Sleep Center for an overnight sleep study to gather as much data as possible. Overnight sleep studies use state-of-the-art

equipment and comfortable, soothing environments to provide optimal sleep conditions for patients. A wealth of data is collected by monitoring brain waves, eye movements, leg movements, respiratory effort, airflow, blood oxygen levels, and more. After the study, a board-certified sleep doctor reviews and analyzes the sleep data and makes a diagnosis. The sleep doctor then sends recommendations to the referring provider for a personalized treatment plan based on the diagnosis.

When examining Ella's throat, it was noted that her tonsils were inflamed, a common sign of obstructive sleep apnea, which is a condition characterized by interrupted breathing during sleep. After analyzing Ella's sleep study results, Harjoth Malli, MD, diagnosed her with obstructive sleep apnea. Under the guidance of Dr. Malli, Ella was given a treatment of positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy, which uses a special device that helps maintain an open

airway during sleep. It made a difference almost overnight. “As soon as she started the CPAP therapy, Ella slept so soundly all night long,” her mom says. “She has so much more energy now too, and her grades have improved. She’s back to her old self.”

“Adolescent sleep disorders are often underestimated or overlooked, despite their significant impact on various aspects of a child’s life,” says Dr. Malli. “Many patients and their parents tend to blame external sources like school pressure or social activities for their fatigue. But

mental health issues as a result of sleep disorders.”

Recognizing the signs of sleep disorders in adolescents is crucial for early intervention. Dr. Malli highlights some common symptoms among children experiencing sleep disorders including excessive sweating, snoring, and teeth grinding. Sleep disorders among adolescents are far more prevalent and impactful than commonly recognized. By addressing sleep problems, it can help



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” —

Danielle Mills
on daughter Ella’s response
to CPAP therapy

many times, it’s a lack of sleep that is contributing to or is the main cause of the problem.” Dr. Malli stresses, “Without the right amount of sleep, and enough quality sleep, children are at risk of not developing physically and mentally in a normal way.”

Dr. Malli emphasizes that sleep problems in adolescents can significantly impact their mental health and overall well-being. “Sleep problems can affect behavior or manifest themselves in the form of medical problems during the day,” Malli explains. “We may see things like irritation, lack of focus, ADHD, restlessness, or

adolescents overcome fatigue, improve their focus and mental health, and pave the way for a brighter future. As the doctors and medical team at the Kaweah Health Sleep Center often witness, the right treatment and therapy can leave patients feeling they have a newfound lease on life. [KH](#)

Learn more about sleep services at [KaweahHealth.org/Sleep](https://www.KaweahHealth.org/Sleep).

Common Effects of Sleep Disorders

- Daytime sleepiness
- Irritability
- Lack of focus
- Low motivation
- Attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD)
- Restlessness
- Mental health issues

Commonly Treated Conditions

- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Narcolepsy
- Central sleep apnea
- Insomnia
- Complex sleep apnea
- Restless leg syndrome
- Sleep related hypoventilation
- Pediatric sleep disorders
- REM sleep behavior disorders

Protecting Vascular Health

Vascular services can improve circulatory health for many.



Dr. Lamar Mack has been providing specialty vascular care in Visalia since 2013.

“
What I want to do is make sure patients here in our community get the same treatment they would in any other community or city.
”

Dr. Mack
on the importance of access to local, high-quality care

Good cardiovascular health is one of the most important keys to living a long, healthy life. The cardiovascular system has two main components, which are reflected in the name, cardio- (heart) and -vascular (blood vessels). These two parts work together to deliver blood throughout your body and keep it working well.

At Kaweah Health, you will find both heart doctors and vascular doctors, who deal with the problems specific to each system. For patients with vascular needs, Kaweah Health is privileged to work with many incredibly talented community physicians. A broad range of vascular services are offered through a partnership with South Valley Vascular and their team of doctors: Omar Araim, MD; Matthew Campbell, MD; Abdulrahman Hamdi, MD; Alexander Nguyen, MD; and Sid Agrawal, MD. Kaweah Health is also very fortunate

to work directly with Lamar Mack, MD, who provides patients with the latest and most advanced treatment options.

Dr. Mack is a board-certified surgeon and a provider at the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center who came to Visalia in 2013. He explains the work that he does broadly, “I operate on all of the blood vessels of the body except for the heart. A lot of my work is centered around treating conditions like peripheral arterial disease, varicose veins, and aneurysms.” Vascular surgeons help patients with diseases of the arteries and veins all throughout the body. They also perform a number of common procedures that help patients by repairing weakened arteries, removing plaque build-up in arteries, or inserting a device to widen an artery. Dr. Mack’s purpose in his work is simple, “My main goal with patients is to cure issues and preserve function of limbs. I want them to be independent and keep walking around,” he says. “People’s

vascular health can be fixed and improved.”

Dr. Mack works with a specialized support team to perform vascular procedures at Kaweah Health’s hybrid endovascular operating room. This modern facility gives surgeons the ability to perform traditional, open surgery and minimally-invasive, endovascular procedures on the same patient, at the same time, in the same place. This operating room technology provides surgeons continuous 3D imaging and the opportunity to perform intricate procedures on people with severe, life-threatening conditions. In addition to state-of-the-art surgical equipment, the hybrid operating room also contains advanced imaging equipment needed for minimally-invasive techniques — angiography, CT scans and MRI — providing clear and accurate visualization of small vessels, stents, catheters and guide-wires during complex procedures.

Part of the support team is 34-year Kaweah Health employee Olga Perez-Rodriguez, NP. Starting off as a receptionist in the radiology department, she earned her nursing degree, ultimately becoming a nurse practitioner in

takes on challenging cases, he’s also very caring. You can tell in his demeanor he really cares for his patients.”

In addition to specialized care and advanced facilities at Kaweah Health, patients have access to a range of support services like rehabilitation services, nutrition counseling, and support groups to help them manage their conditions and improve their quality of life. Dr. Mack emphasizes the importance of having access to quality health care close to home, “What I want to do is make sure patients here in our community get the same treatment they would in any other community or city. For me, the future is built on community, and that’s the focus of keeping patients and families local to our Central Valley location.”

The vascular services available at Kaweah Health provide patients with the comprehensive care and support they need without the burden of traveling out of town for care. With experienced medi-

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Not only is he a great surgeon who takes on challenging cases, he’s also very caring. You can tell in his demeanor he really cares for his patients.

— ”
Olga Perez-Rodriguez, NP
on working with Dr. Mack



2017. Today, she works with a team of nurse practitioners who specialize in the care of pre- and post-operative vascular patients. “We work closely with Dr. Mack and other doctors to care for each patient,” says Perez-Rodriguez. “We accompany Dr. Mack to visit each patient, help evaluate conditions, and coordinate procedures.” Having worked alongside Dr. Mack for many years, Perez-Rodriguez has learned a lot about him, “Not only is he a great surgeon who

cal professionals, state-of-the-art facilities, and follow-up support care, Kaweah Health is able to provide high-quality vascular care to its patients. **KH**

▲ Nurse practitioners Eena SaeSee-Noi, Rebecca Barajas, Olga Perez-Rodriguez, and Smitha Fleviya are a vital part of the vascular care services at Kaweah Health.

Back and Neck Pain?

Kaweah Health can help.



Don't let back and neck issues slow you down. Call today for an appointment with one of our local board-certified surgeons.

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KaweahHealth.org/Daniels

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Sequoia Orthopedic and Spine Institute • (559) 733-7888
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Richard B. Williams, M.D. - Neurosurgeon
Center Neurorestoration Associates • (559) 202-0282
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