

# Vital Signs

A portrait of an elderly man with white hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt with a small red and white logo on the collar that says "CCIM".

## A New Lease on Life

**BILL WHITLATCH SHARES HIS STORY OF  
QUINTUPLE BYPASS HEART SURGERY  
AND RECOVERY.**

# Vital Signs

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## VITAL SIGNS

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## LETTER FROM THE CEO

Great things are happening at Kaweah Health despite the financial challenges the entire healthcare industry is experiencing. We are executing a turnaround plan and using our strong financial base to get us back to breaking even. Our efforts include urging the state and federal governments to take action to support hospitals, as well as meeting with our county to discuss options for supporting local healthcare. We thank those of you who have written letters to Governor Newsom to ask for his support. If you have not already, we invite you to sign your name to our letter at [KaweahHealth.org/TakeAction](https://KaweahHealth.org/TakeAction).

Kaweah Health will weather this storm. We will continue to serve Tulare and Kings Counties, just as we have for more than 60 years. Despite the operational and financial challenges associated with the pandemic, our team continues to do amazing things. We will never compromise or diminish the quality and safety of the care we provide to our patients. Our most recent achievement speaks to this commitment — for the first time in our history, we have been named one of America's 100 Best Hospitals™ for 2023. We're one of 20 hospitals in California and the only hospital in the San Joaquin Valley from Kern to Madera counties to receive this distinction from Healthgrades®, which evaluated patient mortality and complication rates for 31 of the most common conditions and procedures at nearly 4,500 hospitals across the country to identify the top-performing hospitals. This achievement puts us in the top two percent of hospitals nationwide for overall clinical performance.

Our heart surgery team is also recognized as America's 50 Best for Cardiac Surgery™ by Healthgrades and is ranked second in California only to Stanford. We have just entered into a partnership with Stanford's Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery to bring their faculty cardiothoracic surgeons to live and work in Visalia. This partnership is similar to our recent alliance with Keck Medicine of USC, which is enhancing urology services in Visalia at our Specialty Clinic at 325 S. Willis St. The partnership is providing patients in the region with access to a world-renowned urology program that is currently ranked in the top 10 in the nation by U.S. News and World Report. These urologists are practicing alongside local urologists Joseph Ford, DO, Tu-Hi Hong, MD, and Marty Prah, MD to ensure Kaweah Health Medical Center patients have improved, on-call access to care.

And finally, in our continuing commitment to meet the demands for mental health services in our community, we have opened our Center for Mental Wellness in Visalia. This center, located at 301 W. Noble Ave., provides outpatient therapy and counseling for people of all ages as a result of major life stresses, trauma, etc. The center will be staffed by professional clinicians and will accept most private insurance, Medicare, and self-pay; appointments can be made by calling (559) 624-6875. Additional access to mental health services, including for Medi-Cal patients, is available through our network of rural health clinics. This is just one of the many projects Kaweah Health is working on to improve mental health services in the Central Valley. Other projects include construction of Tulare County's first mental health hospital for youth and our joint efforts with the county to create a facility open 24/7 to provide crisis intervention services for children and young people under age 21 who are experiencing a mental health crisis.

Again, we thank you for your support as we work hard to care for our community during this unprecedented financial time. There is excellent care available locally, and we encourage you at every opportunity to consider seeking care in your own community.



**Gary Herbst**

Chief Executive  
Officer of  
Kaweah Health

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# Getting Back in the Game

Joint replacement surgeries help people live their best lives.

| Knee replacement surgery has allowed Darin Pace to maintain his active lifestyle.

Life can inflict wear and tear on the body, and fortunately we can recover from many of the bumps and bruises encountered along the way. But sometimes, injuries happen that will not heal correctly on their own and may require medical treatment. The most common places people experience damage are the knee, hip, and shoulder joints. Thanks to advances in science and medicine, fixing these joints through orthopedic surgery has become a common practice, using amazing technology and techniques that often get patients back home on the same day as their surgery.

Darin Pace is a high school principal in Exeter, California and a lifelong athlete, part of many team sports including high school football, swimming, and track, as well as NCAA Division 1 football and a little bit of rugby at the University of Oregon. As with many athletes, he has suffered his share of injuries. A few surgeries would fix some of the problems, but over time he started having trouble with his knees. His first knee replacement was done in San Diego, which seemed like a good idea initially, but after having to travel from Exeter to San Diego for several follow-up appointments, he was not so sure. "It really made things more difficult in my recovery," says Darin. "So, when it was time to replace the other knee, I researched the doctors here locally and found there were a lot of great options."

Darin chose Bruce Le, DO, MS, one of the many skilled orthopedic surgeons at Orthopaedic Associates who work with Kaweah Health. Dr. Le is trained in sports medicine and treats patients of all ages, from teens to people in their 90s. He specializes in shoulders and knees, providing both joint repair and joint replacement. He remembers Darin's case, "Normally we try to repair joints, if possible, but Darin's knee was very bad. He is a perfect patient though — an athlete, motivated to maintain an active lifestyle, great attitude. He was really dedicated to the process."

"When I first met with Dr. Le, I told him I wasn't ready to slow down — I wanted to stay active," recalls Darin. "Dr. Le flew to Italy and found a knee replacement system that fit my lifestyle." After surgery, Darin did three months of physical therapy at Kaweah Health Therapy Specialists before easing back into his favorite activities.

Dr. Le stresses the importance of knowing his patients, "Joint replacement isn't one-size-fits-all, so I wanted to make sure Darin's implant was right for him. I visited the implant's manufacturer in Italy, inspected their processes, talked to their engineers, and learned their philosophy."

Today, Darin is back living an active life. "I'm able to do the things I couldn't do before like play basketball, volleyball, and play tennis with my wife. I can still run, too. It's given me the opportunity to really take my life back," says Darin.

Kaweah Health takes pride in providing high-quality orthopedic surgery services to patients needing help with their joints. Each year, more

than 2,000 orthopedic surgery procedures are performed by skilled surgeons specializing in a range of procedures like joint replacement surgery, spinal surgery, and sports medicine for patients from Visalia, Hanford, Tulare, Porterville, Fresno, Bakersfield, and surrounding areas. Kaweah Health's facilities are state-of-the-art, and surgeons use advanced techniques to ensure the best possible outcomes for patients. In addition to surgical services, Kaweah Health also offers pre- and post-surgical care, including a comprehensive, pre-operative joint replacement class, rehabilitation therapy, and physical therapy. Patients can trust they will receive comprehensive and compassionate care during and after their orthopedic procedures.

Not everyone knows what joint replacement surgery involves or if it is right for them. The surgical procedure to replace a damaged joint, called arthroplasty, oftentimes uses artificial parts made of metal, ceramic, or plastic. It's typically done when a joint



Dr. Bruce Le explains how he performs a knee replacement surgery like Darin's.



| Darin and his wife Tosha enjoy a morning of tennis near their home in Exeter.

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“

***I'm able to do the things that I couldn't before like play basketball, volleyball, and play tennis with my wife. I can still run too. It's given me the opportunity to really take my life back.***

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**Darin Pace**

after his successful  
knee replacement

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is severely damaged and causes chronic pain and limits movement. The most common joints replaced are hips and knees, but shoulders, elbows, and ankles can also be done. Although joint replacement is a common surgery with good outcomes, it is not for everyone. There are many factors that can make someone an ideal candidate, so consult with a doctor about whether this surgery might be an option.

Many people are interested in joint replacement because it can reduce pain, improve mobility, and even improve overall health and well-being. Sometimes, chronic pain can lead to a decreased sense of well-being and even increase the risk of developing other health problems. For patients experiencing a lot of pain, joint replacement surgery can often improve their lives beyond the scope of painful joints.

Kaweah Health is proud to support a robust orthopedic surgery program, significantly improving people's quality of life. If you or someone you know is experiencing joint pain and/or limited mobility, contact a doctor today and see if joint replacement surgery is an appropriate treatment option. 

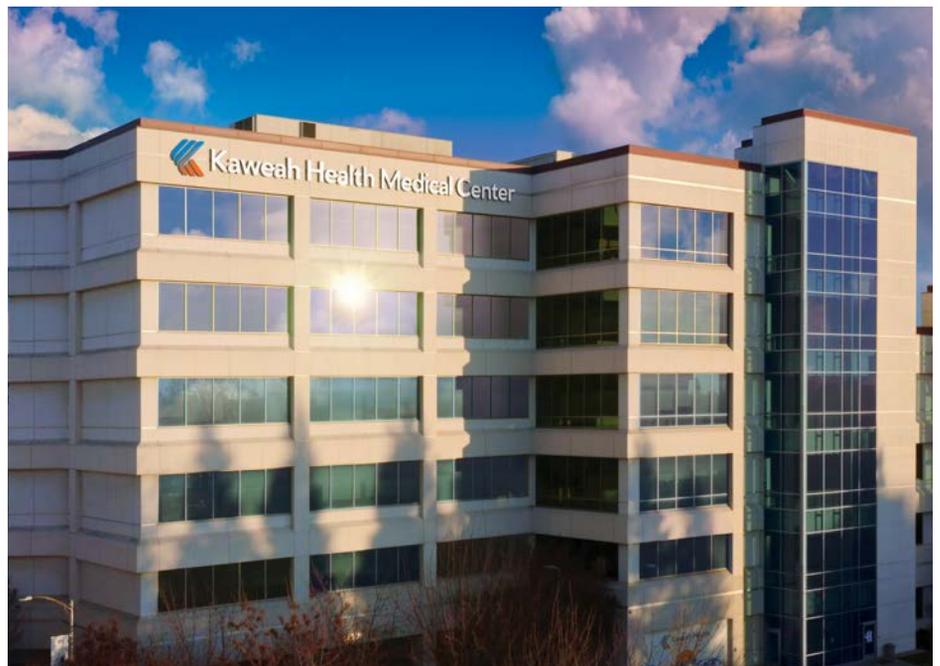
Learn more about orthopedic procedures at [KaweahHealth.org/Ortho](https://www.KaweahHealth.org/Ortho).



# One of America's 100 Best Hospitals™ for 2023

Kaweah Health receives national recognition from Healthgrades®.

In January 2023, Kaweah Health was named one of America's 100 Best Hospitals by Healthgrades, one of the most trusted sources for evaluating hospital quality. While it is a great honor to be recognized at all, it was an even greater honor that Kaweah Health Medical Center was the only hospital in the San Joaquin Valley from Kern to Madera counties to be recognized. This achievement puts Kaweah Health in the top two percent of hospitals nationwide for overall clinical performance across the most common conditions and procedures.



The designation builds upon the five consecutive years Kaweah Health had been recognized as one of Healthgrades' America's 250 Best Hospitals™ (2019-2023). Awards aside, Kaweah Health knows that it is the employees and physicians who are the ones who make it one of the nation's best. Being in the top 100 hospitals in the nation can only happen if there are talented, dedicated people working throughout the ranks, all committed to growth and serving the community.

Kaweah Health's Chief Executive Officer Gary Herbst recognizes the hard work that has gone into the accomplishment, "This is the first time in our history that we've been named one of the best 100 hospitals, and while what we do is not for the awards or praise, it's wonderful to see our team get recognized by a third party for the great work they do. I know we're not perfect; it's an endless journey to get better and better. But our team of physicians, advanced practice providers, our staff — they are incredible, amazing, talented, dedicated people who are committed to this community. We exist solely to care

for our community, and it's something that we are very passionate about."

To determine America's 100 Best Hospitals for 2023, Healthgrades evaluated patient mortality and complication rates for 31 of the most common conditions and procedures at nearly 4,500 hospitals across the country to identify the top-performing hospitals.

Kaweah Health Medical Center is the Central Valley's most recognized hospital for 2023. Among the many awards received, Kaweah Health is one of America's 50 Best Hospitals for Cardiac Surgery™ and is the only hospital in California to be named among the top five percent of hospitals nationwide for Cardiac Surgery for the last six years in a row (2018-2023).

While Kaweah Health works toward realizing its vision of becoming the community's world-class healthcare choice for life, it is important to celebrate successes like these along the way. Congratulations to the Kaweah Health family for all of the hard work and dedication to provide quality health care. **KH**

*Statistics are based on Healthgrades analysis of MedPAR data for years 2019 through 2021 and represent three-year estimates for Medicare patients only. California's Central Valley refers to Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Tuolumne counties. The San Joaquin Valley region is defined as Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Mono, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare counties.*

# Building Strength, Restoring Health

Medically-based gym is helping people reach better health.



Robert Dempsie works out five days a week to help keep his heart healthy after open-heart surgery in the fall of 2021.

Robert Dempsie began his career 33 years ago as Deputy District Attorney in Tulare County, and retired as Assistant District Attorney in March 2022. Robert had just announced his retirement when he received some startling news from his doctor — he was going to need open-heart surgery. And while the timing was bad, the outlook was good. Robert’s bypass surgery was successful, and he was soon on the way to recovery. As part of his recovery plan, he started attending the Lifestyle Fitness Center after completing the cardiac rehab program at Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital in September 2021. It was a difficult transition for him at first, “When you start to slowly push yourself after a major surgery like that, there is a lot of fear and uncertainty,” Robert says. “But my confidence level grew tremendously. I worked with three staff who oversaw my sessions. They monitored my heart rate, evaluated my routine, and added things when I was ready.” Recently, Robert

received a report from his cardiologist that his heart function had improved because of his dedication to exercising. He also attends the Healthy Heart program three days a week and does an independent program two days a week.

Kaweah Health Lifestyle Fitness Center is Visalia’s largest gym, filling two stories and offering an impressive range of facilities, classes, and services to thousands of happy and healthy members. It is also the official gym of the Visalia Rawhide baseball team, and you can find members of the team working out there regularly. You might even see professional boxer and 2020 Olympic Silver Medalist Richard “Kiki” Torrez training for his next fight! While features like the indoor track and pools are some of the best around, one thing that makes the center stand out even more is that it is the only medically-based fitness facility in Visalia. That means there are educated, certified, and experienced fitness professionals available to help

members achieve their goals. Members can have their exercise programs designed by an exercise physiologist specifically for their health and fitness needs, with complimentary wellness checks, fitness profiles, and program designs. Located near the main artery of the city, the gym is easily accessible and has been helping people achieve their fitness goals for more than 30 years.

Lifestyle Fitness Center was originally created with the purpose of providing people who were exiting rehab therapy with a place where they could continue exercising and pursue healthy living after rehab. From this original idea, it has grown into a premier fitness facility that caters to people of all ages, fitness levels, and health goals. It offers referral programs like Healthy Heart, Breathing Easy, and A1 Care, which focus on addressing common health problems and aim to keep people healthy. Patients recovering from open-heart surgery or other heart procedures take part in the

cardiac rehab program at Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital. The program has helped many people recover their heart function and lead healthier lives. It includes exercise, education, and counseling and can help patients recover more quickly and reduce the risk of complications. For cardiac rehab patients, regular exercise offers huge benefits like improving cardiovascular fitness, strengthening muscles, and promoting overall health and well-being.

Larry Marconette is another open-heart surgery patient who began coming to Lifestyle Fitness Center in November 2018 as part of his recovery plan. After completing the cardiac rehab program, he got COVID-19 in 2020 and became very ill, and ultimately ended up in Kaweah Health Medical Center. During his stay, Larry became diabetic and began requiring insulin for the first time in his life. Upon Larry's discharge, the doctor recommended he start exercising regularly as part of his recovery. Larry began going to Lifestyle Fitness Center and joined the Healthy Heart and A1 Care classes to help with his strength. With dietary changes and exercising five days a week, Larry was able to come off insulin and is feeling like himself again. "I'm very grateful to the instructors and staff who've helped me get to where I am today. They gave me a lot of support and showed me how to live a healthier life." Larry also enjoys the camaraderie he's found in the classes, "With the Healthy Heart class in particular, you get to know everyone



**| Larry Marconette is a regular at Lifestyle Fitness Center after undergoing open-heart surgery in 2018.**

because you're all supporting each other in getting better." Larry still goes to the gym five days a week as part of Lifestyle's Healthy Heart class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and A1 Care class every Tuesday and Thursday.

It was many years ago when Tammy Farrell came down with an acute case of valley fever, and it has been a long



**| After battling valley fever, Tammy Farrell keeps a workout routine at Lifestyle Fitness Center to help maintain healthy lungs.**

road since then to feeling better. Tammy completed the pulmonary rehab program at Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital. As part of her journey, her doctor recommended she join a gym as a way to strengthen her cardiovascular and pulmonary health. So, she joined Lifestyle Fitness Center in February 2022 and began attending the Breathing Easy class, which focuses on stretching and cardio. After one year of dedicated attendance, three times a week, Tammy notices a huge difference. "I feel so much better, and my lung function has improved measurably," she says. "The staff is really helpful and

reassuring, regularly checking my oxygen and pulse, answering any questions I have. They keep it really clean too, which is important to me." Tammy is especially pleased with how her day-to-day life has improved. "I can do more around the house now and be more active than before, which has made things so much better," she says.

With modern equipment, a diverse range of fitness classes, personal training options, and a welcoming atmosphere, the gym is supporting the health of the whole community. Whether you are a seasoned athlete or just starting out on your fitness journey, the Lifestyle Fitness Center has something to offer just about everyone. 

Learn more about Lifestyle Fitness Center at [TheLifestyleCenter.org](https://www.thelifestylecenter.org).

# Close to Home,

Central Valley doctors are happy to



| Dr. Melissa Kemp is a second-year emergency medicine resident from Fresno who worked as a scribe in the Kaweah Health Emergency Department at the beginning of her journey to become a doctor.

# Close to the Heart

complete their residency near family and friends.



| GME Manager Krystal De Azevedo is one of the many GME staff who make Kaweah Health's Graduate Medical Education program highly sought after.

Graduate medical education (GME) residency programs play a crucial role in training the next generation of physicians and solving a problem many hospitals in rural areas face — attracting and retaining top talent. Ten years ago, Kaweah Health embarked on a new program to solve that problem and increase the quality of care in the process. The idea was simple: provide high-quality education, help residents feel at home, and they would be more likely to stay in the area to practice medicine. So far, the program has succeeded at doing that. With education programs in Anesthesiology, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Psychiatry, General Surgery, and Transitional Year, Kaweah Health has successfully created residency training programs that retain more than 40 percent of the graduated doctors locally in the Central Valley to practice medicine.

Although the GME program attracts resident doctors from across the country, Kaweah Health is also a residency destination of choice for many Central Valley locals who are looking to give back to their community. Melissa Kemp, DO, is a second-year resident with an emergency medicine specialty. Her history with Kaweah Health is deep and goes back to the early days of the GME program. “Before I went to med school, I worked as a scribe in the Kaweah Health Emergency Room,” she says. “It really influenced me to become an emergency medicine doctor. I love the challenge and excitement of the ER.” Many years after her days as a scribe, Dr. Kemp saw some familiar faces when she began her residency. “Dr. Van Dyk and Dr. Oldroyd were residents in the ER when I was a scribe, and they’re still working here today,” she says. She is not surprised though, “For me and a lot of the residents who come through Kaweah Health, it’s such a great program and experience that it makes you want to stay in the area.”

In addition to the education component of GME, the program helps



| Dr. Saina Gill is a second-year psychiatry resident who grew up in the Central Valley.

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**“  
Kaweah Health was my number one choice for residency. There is a diverse patient population, a wide range of pathologies, and excellent learning opportunities. I really feel at home.**”

**”**  
**Dr. Saina Gill**  
on choosing Kaweah Health  
for residency

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pathologies, and excellent learning opportunities. I really feel at home.”

In addition to the core education programs, Kaweah Health’s Office of GME also offers several fellowship programs for residents who wish to receive additional training in a specific subspecialty. These include fellowships in Emergency Ultrasound, Clinical Teaching and Simulation, and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Throughout their studies, resident doctors have the opportunity to work with diverse patient populations as well and receive hands-on training in a variety of clinical settings. The program emphasizes a team-based approach to patient care, and residents are encouraged to work closely with attending physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals to provide the best possible care to their patients.

GME programs at Kaweah Health provide a valuable opportunity for residents to receive specialized training and gain firsthand experience in their chosen fields. These programs are an important step in the journey towards becoming a competent and compassionate physician and are an essential part of the healthcare system in Visalia and beyond. **KH**

residents feel like family. GME Manager Krystal De Azevedo shares how the program tries to ensure residents feel at home, “We really work hard to make sure the residents are well-supported, both professionally and socially. There are a lot of opportunities for residents and their families,” she says. “The faculty is very inclusive and supports a lot of different learning opportunities. For example, there is a journal club that’s really popular where the residents meet to read, present, and discuss important current topics in medical journals. There are also social events across the different specialties

where residents, spouses, and families can get together outside of class for some time to get to know each other.”

Saina Gill, MD is a second-year psychiatry resident who set her sights on Kaweah Health from the beginning. “I grew up in Clovis, and I really wanted to be in a place I felt connected to,” she says. “I did rotations in other hospitals before coming here, and nothing felt as warm as the environment at Kaweah Health.” She could also relate to the people here, “Kaweah Health was my number one choice for residency. There is a diverse patient population, a wide range of

# Caring for Young Minds

## Grant funding is making big impacts on mental health service.

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns affected all groups of people, but particularly those under 21, due to their unique social needs. Losing access to friends and educational support systems abruptly created a new reality for them, which resulted in an increase in depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Across the country, this group was forced to seek out a higher level of mental health care. The youth in Tulare County are no different, and Kaweah Health has seen an increase in those seeking services. Unfortunately, there is no local place for them to go other than the emergency department for round-the-clock mental health evaluations. Fortunately, with the help of a new program and two state grants, Kaweah Health is on track to help youth in need get mental health care more easily.

In March 2022, Kaweah Health, in partnership with Tulare County Health and Human Services, received a grant for \$4,909,775 to build a new youth crisis stabilization unit (CSU) near Oval Park in Visalia, which will provide care for youth experiencing a mental health crisis. This CSU will be open 24 hours a day and accommodate up to 12 patients, creating a safe space for young people while their future care is coordinated. Instead of being in the main hospital emergency department without target services, patients will

go to the CSU to be evaluated and start services with a provider.

Building off this success, Kaweah Health Foundation applied for another state grant in summer 2022 through the Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program to add more youth mental health services. In December, a grant was awarded for

### What is a grant?

A grant is money given by an organization or government (federal, state, or local) to support a person, group, or project. The money can be used for programs, research, equipment, training, and more. Unlike a loan, grants are gifts and do not have to be repaid. A grant benefits not just the organization that receives it, but the public as well.

### Kaweah Health Foundation

In recent years, Kaweah Health Foundation has been awarded more than \$26 million in grant funds from state, federal, and private resources, helping Kaweah Health perform important health care services and providing economic benefits to the area, including jobs.

\$8,780,558 to construct a new wing on the Kaweah Health Mental Health Hospital located on Akers and Tulare in Visalia. Kaweah Health's Director of Facilities and Planning Kevin Morrison explains, "The facility was initially planned to have this fourth wing, so the site is already ideal for the addition. With the support of the grant funds from the state, it makes the process much easier."

Theresa Croushore, Kaweah Health's Director of Behavioral Health Service Line, noted that the facility will serve about 500 youths each year to start, and perhaps up to 1,000 each year within five years. In addition, the treatment plan will involve families and caregivers, extending the reach of the provided care. "We will work with area pediatricians, schools, LGBTQ groups, churches, and more, to help support their youth populations' behavioral health needs," Croushore says. "Once patients finish their stay at the hospital, Kaweah Health will offer intensive outpatient treatment as well." The facility is scheduled to open in spring of 2025.

The new Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness is currently open and serving the mental health needs for people of all ages. **KH**

Learn more at [KaweahHealth.org/MentalHealth](https://KaweahHealth.org/MentalHealth), or call (559) 624-6875.



# Patchworks of Love

Local group creates personalized quilts for pediatric patients.

| Jody Nicholson chooses material to use on the back of the quilt tops.

Quilting is an art that has been around for centuries, usually done to create clothing or bed covers, although now it is common to find quilting done purely for decorative purposes. For a group of quilters in Three Rivers, California, it means something even different — it means bringing comfort and reassurance to the children staying in Kaweah Health's Pediatrics Unit. This group of about a dozen volunteers are part of the Comfort for Kids Group, a program of the Three Rivers Seniors League. They have been dedicating their time and talent to create beautiful quilts for pediatric patients for more than 30 years.

Every Tuesday morning from January to April, the group meets at the Three Rivers Memorial Building to make quilts. Although the core of the group works out of Three Rivers, there

are members who contribute quilt tops from Woodlake, Exeter, and Visalia. There are even a few from out of state, in North Carolina and Texas, who sew quilt tops and mail them to the group throughout the year for completion. Working entirely with donated materials and funding, the group has donated more than 1,500 quilts, afghans, and beanies since 2018, including 160 in just the first two months of 2023.

Karen Meeker is one of the long-time members of the group. "We've been doing this for a while, so we really have our process down," she states. The quilters use an assembly line which spans two rooms and nearly a dozen large tables. Each quilt goes through six steps, and for each finished quilt, as many as 10 people may have contributed to its construction. Once enough quilts have been



made, Karen delivers them to Kaweah Health. "About five years ago, we started donating quilts to Kaweah Health, and it's been a great partnership. Even through the pandemic, we were able to deliver quilts for the children there," Karen says.

Outside of the weekly work sessions, group members find material donations or buy new materials with donated money. "We are very lucky to have so many generous donations to our group," Karen says. "We work with a lot of different local organizations like Three Rivers Woman's Club, Thingerie Thrift Shop, and the local Lions Club. With their help and some private donations, we are able to make all of these wonderful quilts for almost no cost."

Dot Robb is 91 years old and one of the group's founding members. Her original vision for the group was simple. "We started doing the quilts in 1986 here in Three Rivers after my husband and I retired. We wanted to make something for the children in the hospital to help them feel better," she remembers.

The quilts themselves are more than just a warm blanket. They offer a sense of comfort and security to children who are sometimes facing

“

***We wanted to make something for the children in the hospital to help them feel better.***

”

**Dot Robb**

founding member  
of Comfort for Kids

serious illnesses or a longer stay in the hospital. As long as there is a supply, every child who comes through the pediatrics unit receives a quilt, courtesy of Comfort for Kids. Comfort for



**| Top:** Karen Meeker prepares a stack of completed quilts for delivery to the Kaweah Health Pediatrics Unit. **Middle:** Dot Robb is one of the original members of Comfort for Kids. She started the group in 1986 after her retirement. **Bottom:** Peter Sodhy helps stitch together quilts and maintains the group's sewing machines.



Kids hopes their quilts will provide a small source of security during children's time in the hospital. Their generosity has not gone unappreciated. Pediatrics Nurse Manager Danielle Grimaldi has helped give out hundreds of the quilts. "The children, and the parents too, are so grateful. It's a very thoughtful gesture and they do it all from the goodness of their hearts. They never ask for anything," she says. "Every time they bring a new shipment, we get really excited." **KH**

Learn more about Comfort for Kids by contacting Leah Launey at [LCLauney@LauneyMediation.com](mailto:LCLauney@LauneyMediation.com).



# A New Lease on Life

Cardiothoracic Surgery Clinic offers life-saving procedures and world-class care.

| Bill and Clare Whitlatch are grateful for the world-class heart care at Kaweah Health.

**F**or many, Bill Whitlatch is a familiar, friendly face in the Visalia community. As a retired police officer, he spent many years serving the public and getting to know them as well. After retiring from the Visalia Police force, Bill began working in sales before landing in the commercial real estate business, where he kept a high profile in the community and served on numerous organizational boards, most notably The Samaritan Center and ImagineU Interactive Children's Museum.

When Bill's heart began having problems, his cardiologist recommended an angioplasty and stent procedure. He went in for the procedure, which was expected to be

routine, but much to Bill's surprise, he woke up on the operating table to his doctor telling him some startling news. "The doctor said I had one completely blocked artery and the other four were more than 90 percent blocked," recalls Bill. "It was a big shock, and he told me that I would need immediate bypass surgery to fix the problem." Bill was checked in at Kaweah Health Hospital and promptly received a quintuple bypass surgery.

During a bypass surgery, healthy blood vessels are taken from another part of the body and used to go around the blocked blood vessels of the heart. A quintuple bypass means that all five of the major vessels to the heart are blocked and therefore need

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**“**  
***I'm an armed forces veteran, and I could have gone to any hospital I wanted to, but with the great heart care here, I never even considered going anywhere else.***  
**”**

**Bill Whitlatch**  
on choosing Kaweah Health  
for his heart surgery

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to be bypassed. Bill's surgery was performed by Frederick Mayer, MD, and it saved Bill's life. During the surgery, Dr. Mayer found something unexpected, "Bill's heart showed evidence that he had experienced

that affect the heart, lungs, and other organs in the chest. This can include things like heart disease, lung cancer, and emphysema. Patients often receive a variety of care including non-invasive or invasive procedures,

cardiac technicians, who work together to provide a continuum of care and offer the best possible outcomes. To date, there have been more than 7,900 open-heart surgeries performed at Kaweah Health.

“  
*Bill's heart showed evidence that he had experienced three or more small heart attacks in the past.*  
”

Dr. Frederick Mayer  
on viewing Bill Whitlatch's heart

| Dr. Frederick Mayer performed a quintuple (five times) bypass surgery on Bill Whitlatch's heart.

three or more small heart attacks in the past.” The small heart attacks had left some visible scar tissue on his heart. After the surgery, Bill recovered in Kaweah Health's state-of-the-art cardiovascular intensive care unit under the watchful eye of specially trained staff. “They took amazing care of me during my stay. From top to bottom, the staff was there for me whenever I needed them,” Bill says. “I'm an armed forces veteran, and I could have gone to any hospital I wanted to, but with the great heart care here, I never even considered going anywhere else.”

For people seeking cardiothoracic care, having access to high-quality services is a must. Cardiothoracic care refers to the medical and surgical treatment of diseases and conditions

medications, lifestyle changes, and bypass surgery. Cardiothoracic surgeons and cardiologists are specialists who provide this type of care. Kaweah Health is proud to offer world-class cardiac services here in Visalia, through our partnerships with Cleveland Clinic, the top cardiac program in the nation, and more recently, Stanford Medicine, the top cardiac program in California.

Kaweah Health's cardiothoracic care program was founded in 1996 by one of the area's most accomplished and recognized cardiothoracic surgeons, Dr. Frederick Mayer. The cardiothoracic program is focused on improving the quality of life for heart patients and includes teams of cardiac surgeons, cardiologists, vascular surgeons, nurses, perfusionists, and

The cardiothoracic care provided by Kaweah Health represents some of the best care you can find in the Central Valley. In fact, in 2022, Healthgrades® recognized Kaweah Health's cardiac program as number two in California and one of America's 50 Best for Cardiac Surgery™. There are many types of heart surgeries available:

- **Minimally-invasive heart surgery** — Surgeons performing minimally-invasive heart valve surgery can use incisions only a few inches wide to replace or repair malfunctioning valves.
- **Heart valves surgery** — Two common problems caused by valve disease are narrowing valve openings and leaking valves. When a valve narrows or leaks, blood flow is restricted and puts strain on the





Bill Whitlatch is back at work in his home office.

heart which can lead to heart failure and irregular heart rhythms.

- **Septal defect surgery** — Septal defects are holes in the heart that allow blood to flow to parts of the heart and lungs where it should not. These defects are repaired by using sutures or patching the hole.
- **Maze procedure** — Irregular heartbeats can be treated by something called the maze procedure, a surgical treatment that stops an irregular heartbeat, lowering the risk of blood clots or stroke.
- **Thoracic surgery** — This can treat diseased or injured organs in the thorax, including the esophagus, trachea, diaphragm, heart, and lungs.

The quality of the cardiac care offered at Kaweah Health is well-known and has been recognized by Healthgrades, one of the most trusted sources for evaluating hospital quality. Each of these awards stands as a testament to Kaweah Health's commitment to bringing quality care to the community. **KH**

Learn more about Kaweah Health's award-winning cardiac care at [KawahHealth.org/Heart](https://www.kawahhealth.org/Heart).





# Kaweah Health Cardiology Center WELCOMES

## LaMar Mack, MD

Board Certified Vascular Surgeon

### Health issues addressed at the center:

- Aortic aneurysm repair
- Aortoiliac disease
- Carotid stenosis
- Peripheral arterial disease
- Thoracic outlet syndrome (TOS)
- Hemodialysis access

### About Kaweah Health Cardiology Center

The Kaweah Health Cardiology Center opened in 2018 to improve the community's access to cardiology services. Along with Dr. Mack, the center staffs a team of cardiologists:

**David Cislowski, MD**

**Ankur Gupta, MD**

**Dennis Johnson, MD**

**Harry Lively, MD**

**Atul Singla, MD**

This 13,425-square-foot center in Visalia promotes heart and vascular health and provides ongoing evaluation and management of heart and vascular problems.

Cardiologists on staff provide general cardiology and interventional cardiology care. The center also houses Kaweah Health's Diagnostic Center, providing state-of-the-art cardiac imaging including echocardiogram, stress testing, cardiac PET, and nuclear imaging tests.



**Kaweah Health Cardiology Center**  
**Kaweah Health Diagnostic Center**

820 S. Akers St., Suite 130 • Visalia, CA 93277  
(559) 624-6520

[KaweahHealth.org/Heart](https://KaweahHealth.org/Heart)

# Heart-Healthy Habits: Small Changes, Big Impact

Making changes to your diet can lead to a longer, healthier life.

**M**aking lifestyle changes such as adopting a healthy diet can go a long way in preventing heart problems and living a healthy life long into the future. One dietary pattern that has been shown to be particularly beneficial for heart health is the Mediterranean diet.

The Mediterranean diet is a way of eating that is common in countries like Greece, Italy, and Spain. It includes eating whole, unprocessed foods, with a variety of fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, whole grains, legumes, and olive oil. Fish and seafood are also staples of the Mediterranean diet, and poultry and eggs are consumed in moderation. Red meat is consumed less frequently and usually in small portions.

The emphasis on plant-based foods provides a wealth of nutrients and phytochemicals that are important for heart health, many of which help to reduce the risk of heart disease. Healthy fats, like olive oil, have been shown to help lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease. They are also a source of antioxidants, which may help to protect against oxidative stress and inflammation, both of which are risk factors for heart

disease. Moderate amounts of protein help maintain muscle mass and support overall health. Fish and seafood are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to lower blood pressure, reduce inflammation, and improve cholesterol levels, all of which can help to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Of course, wanting to make changes in your lifestyle is often easier than actually starting and sustaining the effort until it becomes a new habit. One thing that helps when working to create new healthy habits is to make small changes over time until they become part of your routine. For example, drink a cup of water with each meal or before you drink a sugar-sweetened beverage. Or try cooking with olive oil instead of butter. Over time, these small changes will add up and lead you to a healthier diet, and life.

Adopting a Mediterranean diet can be a simple and delicious way to support heart health. If you are looking for ways to make some healthy changes, consider giving the Mediterranean diet a try. It may be just what your heart needs. **KH**

## Big changes start with small steps.

### Try some of these steps and work toward building a healthier diet for life!

- Cook with olive oil instead of butter.
- Choose whole grain bread instead of white bread.
- Make brown rice instead of white rice.
- Choose fish or shrimp for your entrée instead of beef or chicken.
- Fill half of your lunch and dinner plate with vegetables before adding anything else.
- Order a veggie burger instead of a beef burger when you go out.
- Drink at least a cup of water with each meal and before having any sugar-sweetened beverages.
- If eating canned fruits, choose fruits packed in juice instead of syrup.
- Eat whole fruit (fresh, frozen, or canned) and limit fruit juice to half a cup per day.
- Eat a rainbow of fruits and vegetables every day.

# Bringing Stanford to the Central Valley



**Stanford**  
MEDICINE

Health Care

Top two cardiac programs in California come together to bring world-class heart care to Visalia.

**K**aweah Health is excited to announce its new cardiothoracic surgery partnership with Stanford Medicine, completed in late 2022. With Stanford Medicine and Kaweah Health being named #1 and #2 in California for Cardiac Surgery in 2022 by Healthgrades®, the partnership brings the top two cardiac programs in the state together to provide world-class heart surgery and cardiac care to the community.

The new partnership with Stanford's Cardiothoracic Surgery Program is under the leadership of Joseph Woo, MD, Chair of the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Stanford. The partnership's goal is to help Kaweah Health recruit and employ new heart surgeons from Stanford. Dr. Woo and Kaweah Health Medical Director of Cardiothoracic Surgery Frederick Mayer, MD, are working together to recruit two cardiothoracic surgeons who will live and work in Visalia and become integral members of the medical staff and community. These physicians will also serve as faculty members at Stanford. The first candidates will visit Kaweah Health for interviews beginning this year.

Dr. Mayer was with Kaweah Health's cardiac services at the beginning. "I started the cardiac program here in

1995, and we did our first open heart surgery in 1996. We've maintained high ratings for the state, and we're currently the number two cardiac surgery

“

***Working with Stanford Medicine, we'll be able to recruit top-tier cardiac surgeons to ensure Visalia and the Central Valley have the best heart care available for many years to come.***

”

**Dr. Frederick Mayer**

Kaweah Health Medical Director  
of Cardiothoracic Surgery

program in California. I'm quite pleased with the program and what we've provided." Looking forward, he explains the importance of the new partnership. "Working with Stanford Medicine, we'll be able to recruit top-tier cardiac surgeons to ensure Visalia and the Central Valley have the best heart care available for many years to come."

As a partner, Stanford will help Kaweah Health develop new services and capabilities to care for cardiac patients here in Tulare County, with Stanford surgeons practicing out of the Kaweah Health Cardiothoracic Surgery Clinic on Main Street in downtown Visalia. In cases where Kaweah Health does not provide direct services (for example, very complex open-heart surgeries or heart transplants) the local Stanford surgeons will help facilitate patient transfers to Stanford in Palo Alto, California. The partnership is crucial in helping to recruit world-class cardiothoracic surgeons to our community. In addition, Kaweah Health's affiliation with Cleveland Clinic, the top hospital for cardiology and heart surgery in the U.S. for 28 consecutive years, remains unchanged.

Moving forward with partners like Stanford and the Cleveland Clinic, Kaweah Health knows that these critical cardiovascular programs will grow even stronger to continue providing world-class heart care to the community, keeping people close to home with great results. 

Learn more about the Kaweah Health Cardiothoracic Surgery Clinic at [KaweahHealth.org/Heart](https://www.KaweahHealth.org/Heart).

# Improving Local Urological Health



| Dr. Inderbir Gill is the Executive Director of USC Institute of Urology and leads the collaboration with Kaweah Health.

## New collaboration with USC Urology brings more specialist care to the area.

**W**orking to meet the health needs of the community is a priority at Kaweah Health. Despite having an experienced team of urologists in Joseph C. Ford, DO, Tu-Hi Hong, MD, and Marty L. Prah, MD, the

growth of our community has been faster than the growth of new medical specialists such as urologists. In fact, shortages in urologists nationwide have been an increasing problem in recent years, as older physicians retire

and the population of older Americans needing care grows. According to the American Urological Association, nearly 30 percent of the urology workforce is over the age of 65, with 52 percent of the workforce over the age

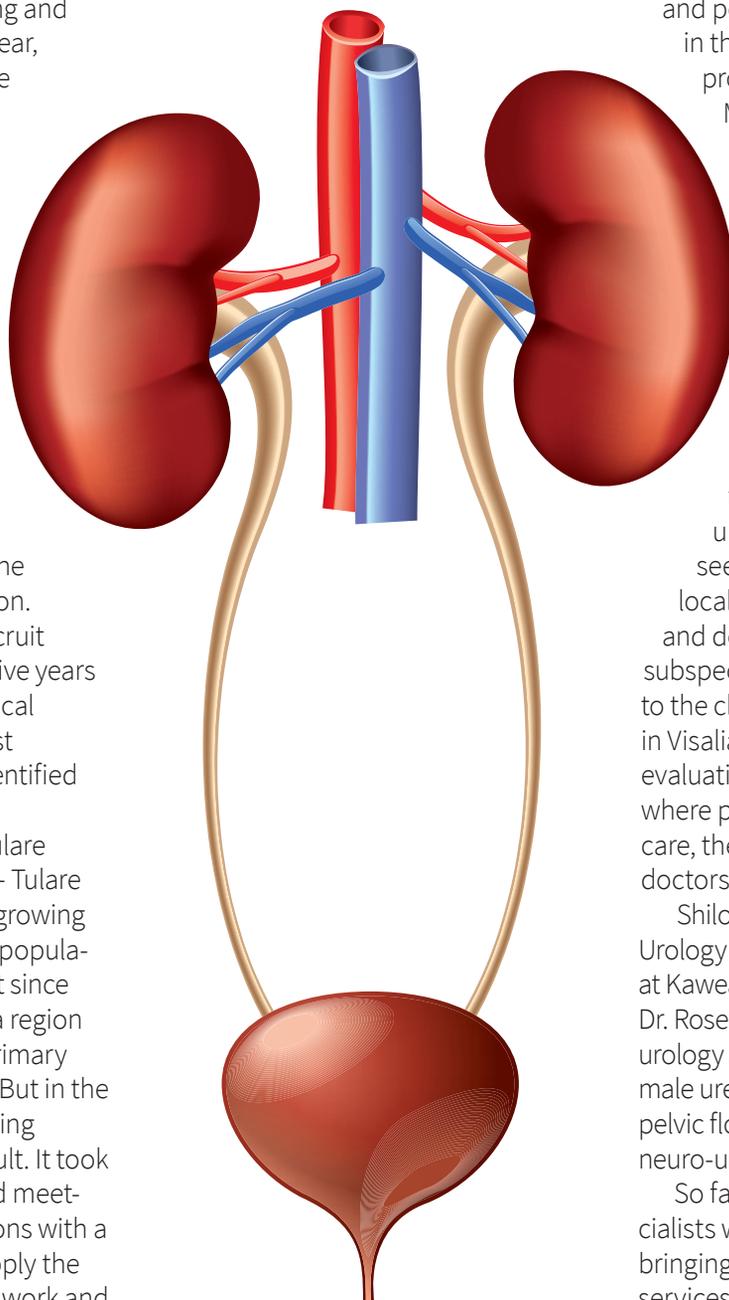
of 55. It's a problem across the country – 63 percent of US counties have no urologists. With this lack of available care, residents must leave their area, often traveling great distances for it. And with just over 300 new urologists completing their training and joining the workforce each year, communities everywhere are feeling the strain.

Kevin Bartel, Kaweah Health's Director of Orthopedics, Neurosciences, and Specialty Practice, shares the concern and commitment that Kaweah Health has to strengthening urology services in Tulare County, "We have three excellent urology providers at Kaweah Health, but we need more to meet the needs of a growing population. We have been working to recruit more urologists for the last five years because it's a big need for local residents. It's one of the most important services we've identified to strengthen."

Like much of the state, Tulare County is growing, and fast – Tulare County is the eighth fastest growing county in California, with its population increasing by 28 percent since 2000. The ability to care for a region growing in population is a primary concern for Kaweah Health. But in the current environment, recruiting urologists is incredibly difficult. It took several years of research and meetings to establish collaborations with a program that could help supply the doctors needed. After much work and planning, a collaboration was established with USC Keck School of Medicine Department of Urology. The collaboration will help Kaweah Health meet two important goals. First, it will increase the availability of services to the community. Second, collaborating with an academic medical center with a robust urology program will make it easier for Kaweah Health to recruit

urologists to live and work in our community over the long term.

The new collaboration was finalized in April 2022, and the new urology



**Urology is the branch of medicine that deals with the diagnosis and treatment of conditions and diseases related to the urinary tract and male reproductive system.**

services are now available and located in the newly renovated Kaweah Health Specialty Clinic on the corner of

Mineral King and Willis (formerly the Chronic Disease Management Clinic). In the future, the Kaweah Health clinics will also have urology staff available as this service grows. A full-time urologist will see patients and perform outpatient procedures in the clinic, while inpatient procedures will be done at the Medical Center.

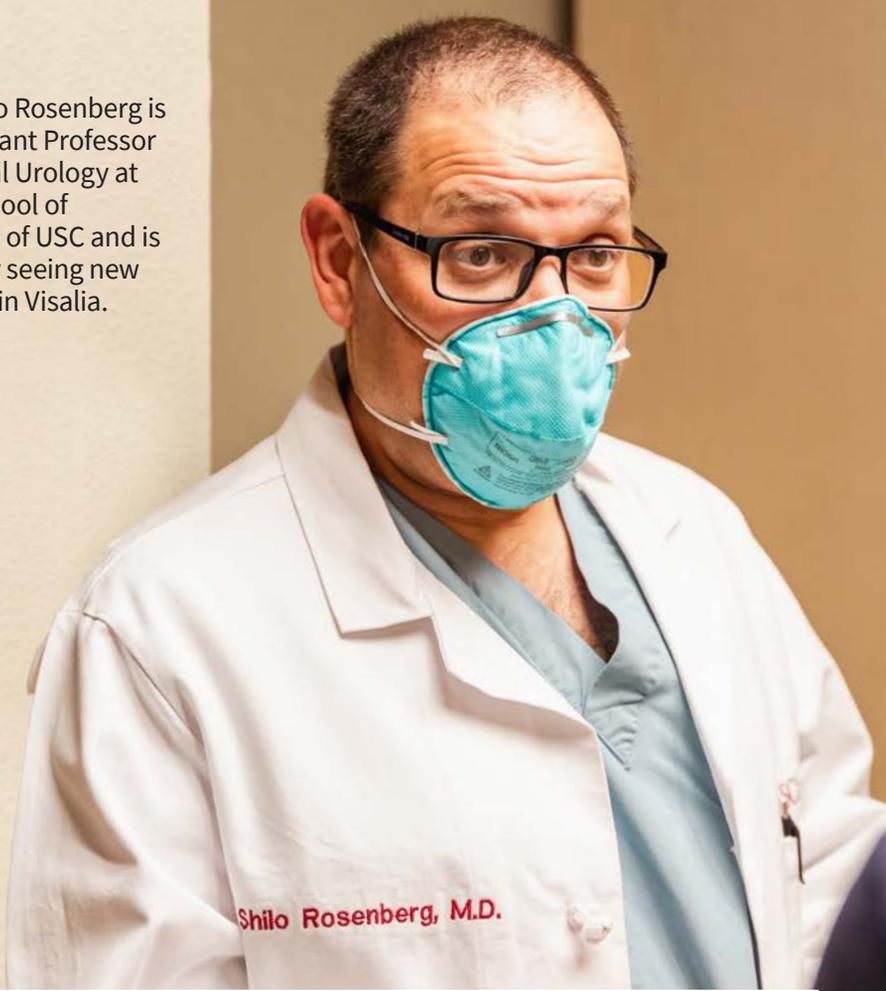
The USC Institute of Urology is led by Executive Director Inderbir S. Gill, MD, who has put together a team of subspecialists to provide the ability to see and keep more urology patients in the Tulare County area. The collaboration with the USC team will provide a full-time urologist at Kaweah Health to see patients and do procedures locally. As patients are diagnosed and determined to need a urology subspecialist, those doctors will come to the clinic to work with patients here in Visalia, whether for consultation, evaluation, or surgery. In the case where patients need a higher level of care, they have direct access to the doctors from USC who can provide it.

Shilo Rosenberg, MD, of USC Urology is currently seeing patients at Kaweah Health Specialty Clinic. Dr. Rosenberg practices general urology and has advanced training in male urethral reconstruction, female pelvic floor reconstruction, and neuro-urology.

So far, at least six urology subspecialists will be part of the program, bringing a host of subspecialty services including robotic/laparoscopic cancer surgery, female pelvic urology, endourology, stone disease, male infertility, reconstructive surgery, and targeted and image-guided therapies.

Dr. Gill underscores the importance of the new relationship with Kaweah Health, "This collaboration will bring more services and subspecialties to a geographic area in great need of

| Dr. Shilo Rosenberg is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Urology at Keck School of Medicine of USC and is currently seeing new patients in Visalia.



| Patient Access Specialist Marissa Nichols checks in patients and keeps the clinic running smoothly.

urology services. We are proud to join the excellent team of providers already practicing in the community to help increase access to care.”

If you or a family member need urological services, please contact the Specialty Clinic at (559) 624-4026 for

help with the referral and scheduling process. You will be connected with a doctor as soon as possible. **KH**

Learn more about Kaweah Health’s urology services at [KaweahHealth.org/Urology](https://www.KaweahHealth.org/Urology).

## UROLOGIC SUBSPECIALTIES

After completing a residency program, many urologists complete advanced training in a subspecialty area lasting an additional 12 to 36 months:

- Urologic surgery
- Urologic oncology and urologic oncological surgery
- Endourology and endourologic surgery
- Urogynecology and urogynecologic surgery
- Reconstructive urologic surgery
- Pediatric urology and pediatric urologic surgery
- Robotic & laparoscopic surgery

# Caring for Our Community



## Kaweah Health Medical Clinic

### Primary Care and Prompt Care

The Kaweah Health Medical Clinic at Ben Maddox provides primary care for patients and prompt care for minor injuries and illnesses that do not require a visit to the emergency department.

- **Open six days a week**
- **Extended hours**
- **Walk-ins welcome**

Having a primary care physician can help you stay healthy through regular check-ups and screenings to detect health problems early. Primary care physicians get to know you and your health needs and can provide individualized advice and guidance based on your unique circumstances.

1110 S. Ben Maddox Way  
Visalia, CA 93292  
(559) 624-4800





# From Advocacy to Action

Community advisory councils shape the way care is provided.

One of the most important ways Kaweah Health works with the local population is by engaging with a wide variety of community advisory councils (CACs). These councils were formed to help hospital leadership make deeper connections with the people being served and inform the many decisions on how to provide the best care.

In the fall of 2017, Kaweah Health introduced the Community Engagement Initiative in an effort to create conversations with locals that would help the hospital make choices that better reflected the people who live here. The initiative aims to improve transparency and communication and allows the residents regular opportunities to provide input and recommendations regarding important strategic decisions.

Diverse groups of community members serve on the councils, authentically representing the community of Visalia. They provide important input that helps Kaweah Health continually improve the healthcare services available in Visalia and the greater Tulare County region.

CACs are not unique to the Visalia area. They are found across the U.S. and represent an essential part of healthcare systems nationwide. The

goal is to provide a way for people to have a direct say in their services. A big part of their input is advocating for the needs of their community. “Our CACs have a great impact on many of the decisions Kaweah Health makes,” says Deborah Volosin, Director of Community Engagement. “We are really fortunate to have such a high level of participation here in Visalia, and we appreciate the chance to make decisions that meet their specific needs.”

Volosin emphasizes the value of the input from the councils, “We no longer assume that people want this or think that — we know this is what they think because they tell us.” Equally important to knowing what people think, want, and need is for them to know that we are listening. “The councils are strong channels of ideas, understanding, and goodwill between the hospital and the people we care for,” says Volosin.

Having a voice in the decision-making process regarding community health is particularly important for the people who live here, because they may not have as much representation in the traditional healthcare system. By bringing people from many different demographics into the CACs, they can ensure their specific needs and

concerns are taken into account when healthcare services are being planned and implemented.

“A lot of the decisions about improving health care in Tulare County have come as a direct result of working with our CACs,” says Volosin. “We have added departments, we have changed marketing strategies, we have updated facilities and processes all based on the work that these groups do. For example, mental health has been at the forefront of many of the CACs’ agendas. They have continued to stay focused on this need, and because of that drive and community partnerships, we are very close to making more mental health services available for our community.”

CACs help drive important conversations by bringing together representatives from Kaweah Health and the community. They build trust and understanding between the two groups and ensure that Kaweah Health is responsive to local needs. This can be particularly important in times of crisis, such as during a pandemic, when the healthcare system may be under a lot of pressure and need to rely on the support of the community to be effective.

Volosin underscores this point, “Trust is of utmost importance when



Members of Kaweah Health’s Diversity Advisory Council. Front, L–R: Kelsie Davis, Beth Bruegman, Elena Nava, Vanessa Mirabal, Lisa Marie Alvarado, Deborah Volosin, Sonia Duran Aguilar.

Back, L–R: Raymond Macareno, Chief Operating Officer Jag Batth, Jorge Zegarra, Chief Compliance/Risk Officer Ben Cripps, President Kaweah Health Board of Directors Dave Francis, Eddie Perez and Nick Vargas.

working with the community advisory councils. Everyone at the table bears the responsibility of trust. We trust that the community members are going to help us educate the community and advocate for us; and they trust that we are going to listen to their concerns and do our best to implement their ideas and act on their feedback.”

Another important role CACs play is in promoting health education and awareness among their family, friends, and neighbors. By providing information and resources, CACs are helping others to advocate for their own health and the health of their families. This is very significant because it helps ensure people are able to take care of their own health and prevent illness whenever possible.

In addition to these benefits, CACs can also be a valuable source of support for healthcare professionals. Their input can help improve the overall effectiveness of the healthcare system, and ensure that it is meeting the needs of the people it serves over the course of their lives. 

Learn more about joining Kaweah Health’s CACs at [KaweahHealth.org/CAC](https://www.KaweahHealth.org/CAC).

There are nine Community Advisory Councils with more than 150 members total, each one meeting regularly throughout the year. Each one consists of at least one member of Kaweah Health’s executive team to ensure that people’s ideas and input are shared directly to the highest level of the organization.

- **Hospital of the Future Committee**
  - Focus: Creating a facility plan to meet future health care needs
- **Community Relations Committee**
  - Focus: Enhancing local partnerships to incorporate community views into hospital planning and communications
- **Healthcare for Today and Tomorrow Committee**
  - Focus: Reviewing current healthcare services and identifying future community needs
- **Diversity Advisory Council**
  - Focus: Ensuring current healthcare services are available to all demographics, gathering recommendations, and bringing more awareness of these services
- **The Community Ambassadors Group**
  - Focus: Promoting Kaweah Health in the community through education and awareness
- **Employee Ambassador Group**
  - Focus: Promoting Kaweah Health both at Kaweah Health and in the community
- **Faith Leaders Ambassador Group**
  - Focus: Representing and promoting Kaweah Health in the faith community
- **Patient and Family Advisory Council**
  - Focus: Ensuring the patient and family perspective is used to co-design safe, high-quality, patient-centered care and services
- **The Emergency Department Advisory Council**
  - Focus: Partnering patients and their family members with health care providers to enhance Emergency Department experiences
- **The Speakers Bureau**
  - Focus: Sharing expertise to help educate and promote the district — Hospital leaders and staff share a list of topics with local organizations such as service clubs, churches, community groups, etc. who need speakers at their meetings.
- **Community Webinar**
  - Focus: Updating community engagement groups on the current state of the hospital and answering questions they have



| Dr. Jorge Garcia helps build trust within the farmworker community by providing education about the Farmworker Health Study.

# Empowerment through Education

Research projects address the health and safety of at-risk communities.

By Alekhya Rajasekaran, volunteer research assistant

*Empower through education* is one of Kaweah Health's organizational pillars, and it is something Kaweah Health's Office of Research aims to meet with each project they undertake. The office consists of Chief Medical Education Officer Lori Winston, MD, FACEP, Director of Research Chris Patty, DNP, RN, Medical Librarian Karen Bontekoe, MLS, and Research Coordinator Jessica Esteves.

Although it is a small department, the Office of Research has an ongoing, significant impact throughout Tulare County and beyond. With more than 40 studies currently in progress and a medical library available to employees, the research department at Kaweah Health is a hub of discovery. In fact,

Kaweah Health authors have published more than 300 scientific papers since 1990, with a majority from the last five years.

The topics of research are diverse, ranging from simple surveys to multi-year studies. Although some of the topics may be universal, many of them deal with local issues affecting communities here and across the Central Valley.

One such study is the Farmworker Health Study, done in partnership with UC Merced and UC Berkeley. The study, funded by the California Department of Public Health, aims to recruit over 1,000 farmworkers from different California regions in order to study and help improve their health. The 1999

California Agricultural Health Workers Survey was the last comprehensive assessment of California farm workers. That study concluded almost 70 percent of the workers lacked any form of health insurance. With about 50,000 farmworkers in Tulare County, Kaweah Health has been playing an essential role in carrying out this study.

During the summer of 2022, a team from Kaweah Health including Chris Patty, DNP, RN, Omar Guzman, MD, Mario Martinez, MD, and Chadi Kahwaji, MD, PhD, Community Outreach Manager Alma Torres-Nguyen, MPH, Jorge Garcia, MD, and countless staff and volunteers collected blood samples from 105 farmworkers at the Kaweah Health clinics in Woodlake,

Dinuba, and Lindsay. Hospital and clinic staff also recorded body measurements and blood pressure, conducted a sense of smell test, and administered a test to measure each participant's cognitive ability. Alma Torres-Nguyen describes the process, "Building trust is key when working with our rural communities." The team worked hard to build that trust by ensuring the participants understood what was going on and updating them after they were done with the study. "I'm really happy with the work we've done. Some participants even felt confident asking for other resources they needed like Medi-Cal assistance, which our Community Outreach Department will gladly provide," states Alma. "The study provided a pathway

farmworker population and will also provide information informing future health care interventions and efforts to create policies to reduce health risks.

Another study was recently done by Kaweah Health Street Medicine. The Street Medicine program is a group of physicians, medical residents, and

founder of the Street Medicine program, created Happy Feet as a campaign for wound care education. The program teaches people how to take care of their wounds, provides medical kits, and answers medical questions. The goal of the program is to reduce the number of emergency department



**| Dr. Jorge Garcia records health data for a participant in the Farmworker Health Study at Kaweah Health Woodlake Clinic.**

for the participants to get the medical help they needed and maybe weren't comfortable asking for otherwise."

The project followed with in-depth phone interviews of the participants, asking them questions about their medical history and current health. The questions will help researchers understand the cause behind any underlying health risks in the

community volunteers who travel throughout Tulare County reaching out to vulnerable populations like undocumented workers, uninsured individuals, and people with food and housing insecurities. For this particular project, called Happy Feet, Street Medicine conducted community pop-up clinics for at-risk populations in Tulare County. Omar Guzman, MD, the

visits and improve self-care knowledge and health within these populations.

Dr. Guzman emphasizes the importance of this kind of project, "Building a trusting relationship for the at-risk community can be done by healthcare providers going to the people, rather than the people coming to us."

So far, the project has reached more than 40 people, distributed dozens of medical kits, exams, pairs of shoes, and socks. More than 20 medical students have volunteered their time, and the program seems to be working. The program goal is to sustain current efforts and expand in the future.

Through its many projects, the Office of Research proudly embodies Kaweah Health's pillars to achieve outstanding community health, deliver excellent service, and empower through education. Look for many more future contributions and insights into the health of the community from this team of leaders. **KH**

# Care.

For some, it's just an emotion.  
For us, it's a career.



**I**t takes a special person to work for Kaweah Health. We serve a region where the challenges are unique and the needs are great. But for us, the greater the need, the greater the reward.

Kaweah Health clinical and support staff are part of an organization that delivers a better quality of life for some, and a second chance at it for many. Every day, our employees have the satisfaction of knowing that they are making a difference in the lives of individuals and their community.

If you want to use your talents alongside people who face each day with courage and purpose,

in an environment that empowers you to do your absolute best, this is where you belong.

Care. For some, it's an emotion. We put it into action every day. If you really want to make a difference, visit [KaweahHealth.org/Careers](http://KaweahHealth.org/Careers).



**VISIT: [KaweahHealth.org/Careers](http://KaweahHealth.org/Careers)**





# Grit.

**For you** it's always meant clenching your teeth and pushing through the pain. But what if you're dealing with a hernia, and all the grit in the world won't lift those concrete pavers?

Do you just give up? Nope. Not an option.

So whether you tote pavers, or groceries, or both, we've got your back — because life demands much from you, and the journey to world class demands nothing less of us.

If you think you might benefit from surgery, call your primary care doctor today. If you need help finding a doctor, please call (559) 624-4646.

## Surgery Services



**VISIT:** [KaweahHealth.org/Surgery](https://KaweahHealth.org/Surgery)