

# pulse

Assessing inherited  
cancer risk  
empowers patients

**FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:** Lifesaving neurosurgical procedures | Community Hospital expands robot-assisted surgery program | A family's mental health journey leads to a passion for advocacy | Understanding care options for pressing medical needs

Fall 2024

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**MONTAGE**  
Health

2024



# From the President/CEO

A dramatic shift is about to occur in Monterey County’s neurosurgical landscape with a new lifesaving stroke procedure at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula and a new team of neurosurgeons caring for Monterey County patients.

The procedure is called thrombectomy, and in this edition of *Pulse*, we’re excited to share how this highly effective intervention will greatly improve outcomes for Monterey County stroke patients. It’s happening thanks to a new partnership between Montage Health and University of California, San Francisco, made possible by a philanthropic partnership with David and Joan O’Reilly.

This significant neurosurgical upgrade is one of many ways Montage Health continues to enhance care. You’ll also read about other innovations throughout the organization, including how Community Hospital’s robot-assisted surgery program is growing due to outstanding outcomes and how genetic testing for hereditary cancer is helping our community detect cancer earlier and even prevent it.

And it is my honor to introduce you to three generations of a family who have dedicated their lives to healthcare, each with their own special connection to Montage Health. The spirit of compassion and community in their story is echoed throughout this edition, with other inspiring stories about empowerment and advocacy, helping young people learn healthy habits, and a Community Hospital nurse who helped save the life of a cardiac arrest victim during a day at the pool.

As you will read, providing every person in our community with high-quality and high-level care is Montage Health’s priority. Earlier this year I announced that I’ll be retiring in spring 2025, and while my incredibly rewarding tenure as President and CEO is coming to an end, Montage Health’s commitment to providing excellent care for everyone will continue long into the future.

*Steven Packer MD*  
Steven Packer, MD  
President/CEO  
Montage Health

## ON THE COVER

*Dina Ruiz and her daughter Morgan Eastwood learned about their increased cancer risks through genetic testing.*



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## Lifesaving neurosurgical procedures will soon be available in Monterey County for the first time

**During a stroke, 1.9 million brain cells die every minute. Timely treatment can mean the difference between full recovery and lifelong disability.** But currently in Monterey County, the most serious stroke cases must be transferred to the Bay Area, often leading to delayed treatment and poor outcomes.

That's changing thanks to a new partnership between Montage Health and University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). The alliance establishes a team of UCSF neurosurgeons in Monterey County to provide patients with advanced neurosurgical procedures for stroke and other conditions, all at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula.

New capabilities will include thrombectomy, a lifesaving, minimally invasive procedure that, when performed in time, can dramatically increase the likelihood of complete or near-complete recovery from a stroke. Thrombectomy is an option when a stroke is caused by a blood clot in a large blood vessel, blocking blood flow to the brain.

With thrombectomy, blood flow is restored by mechanically removing the blood clot, much like cardiologists remove clots that can lead to heart attacks. Specially trained neurosurgeons insert a catheter (a flexible tube) into an artery through a small incision and guide it to the brain. A specially designed wire is then inserted through the catheter to retrieve the clot, restoring blood flow.

The procedure usually takes about 15 minutes, and most patients retain normal neurologic function and go home in



*So many people feel stuck with chronic pain, headaches, neurodegenerative disorders, movement disorders, vascular problems, spine problems, and they don't know what's going on. Oftentimes patients wait months to see providers who can't even help them. Our partnership with UCSF enables us to develop an environment where we'll figure out people's problems faster, get them to a doctor who can help, and get better treatment plans underway sooner.*

— Dr. Dragan Dimitrov, neurosurgeon and Medical Director  
Montage Health/UCSF neurosurgery program



Images show increased blood flow to the brain after thrombectomy.

“  
**We want to help everyone in our community have access to this type of critical care when they need it. We selected Montage Health and Montage Health Foundation for this gift because we knew they could create a top-quality program and partnership to meet this need.**  
 — David and Joan O’Reilly

24 hours. Timing, though, is critical, making local capability a major advancement for Monterey County.

“A thrombectomy must be performed as soon as possible for the best outcomes after a stroke occurs,” says Dr. Dragan Dimitrov, neurosurgeon and Medical Director of the new Montage Health/UCSF neurosurgery program. “Having that expertise and capability at Community Hospital eliminates the time required to transfer patients to another hospital, significantly improving stroke outcomes for our community. That literally can mean the difference between life and death, walking again versus being in a wheelchair, living independently versus in a nursing home. The benefits cannot be overstated.”

The program is anticipated to launch in late 2024 or early 2025, after the recruitment of additional neurosurgeons.

### A higher level of care, available locally

The benefits of the new neurosurgery program go beyond improving stroke outcomes. With two new state-of-the-art hybrid operating rooms at Community Hospital, the partnership’s neurosurgeons can perform thrombectomies as well as other advanced procedures, including fixing tangled arteries and veins that can cause bleeding in the brain, removing tumors, and repairing brain aneurysms. The program also adds specially trained ICU staff and inpatient rehabilitation services for stroke patients at Community Hospital.

The partnership was made possible thanks to a significant philanthropic investment made to Montage Health Foundation by community members David and Joan O’Reilly.

“We want to help everyone in our community have access to this type of critical care when they need it,” the O’Reillys say. “We selected Montage Health and Montage Health Foundation for this gift because we knew they could create a top-quality program and partnership to meet this need.”

“Our community is fortunate to have such passionate and dedicated supporters like the O’Reillys,” says Kevin Causey, Vice President and Chief Development Officer of Montage Health. “Their support enables us to provide this high level of care and make great health outcomes possible for everyone in Monterey County.”

### Continuing traditions of partnership and quality

Montage Health has a 90-year history of partnering with philanthropy-minded community members to elevate healthcare for Monterey County patients. This neurosurgical advancement is an example of how that tradition and commitment to quality remain evident, says Dr. Steven Packer, Montage Health President and CEO.




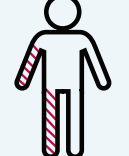


*“Montage Health takes a very thoughtful and conservative approach to introducing new technologies and procedures in our community,” Packer says. “Our service expansions are always dictated by our community’s need. We always ask whether innovations will have a meaningful impact on the health of our community before investing in and implementing them.”*

The long-term goal of the program, Dimitrov says, is to offer a robust local neuroscience landscape where neurosurgeons work with other clinicians to provide advanced care for complex conditions that are often overlooked.

“So many people feel stuck with chronic pain, headaches, neurodegenerative disorders, movement disorders, vascular problems, spine problems, and they don’t know what’s going on,” Dimitrov says. “Oftentimes patients wait months to see providers who can’t even help them. Our partnership with UCSF enables us to develop an environment where we’ll figure out people’s problems faster, get them to a doctor who can help, and get better treatment plans underway sooner. UCSF is a national and worldwide leader in treating neurological disorders and we are fortunate to bring the highest quality of care to Monterey County.”

## Know the signs of a stroke

Time lost is brain lost. Know the signs of a stroke and BE FAST.

<b>B</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>
					
Balance loss	Eyesight changes	Face drooping	Arm or leg weakness	Speech difficulty	<b>Time to call 911</b>

Learn more about your risks and stroke care at Montage Health: [montagehealth.org/stroke](https://montagehealth.org/stroke)



Pam Peete, Armetta Hamilton, and Jasmine Peete

## Three generations of caring for the community

**When Armetta Hamilton joined the nursing team at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula in 1967, she launched a family tradition.**

Over the next 57 years, her daughter and then her granddaughter would walk the same halls Hamilton had, extending the family's legacy of caring for the community.

Hamilton started at Community Hospital after she and her family returned to the Monterey Peninsula from Germany for the second time. When the Army called her husband, high school sweetheart Ollie James Hamilton, to serve in Vietnam, she held down the home front in Seaside, caring for their two children, 12-year-old Larry and 9-month-old Pam, and working as a nurse.

Her first day at Community Hospital led to 29 rewarding

and compassionate years, first at the bedside as a nurse on the Main Pavilion unit, and the last 13 as an administrative supervisor.

"I really, really loved my job," Hamilton says. "I loved the patients. I loved going to work. In 1967, it was a small hospital. Everybody knew everybody. It was like a family. It was home."

Hamilton retired in 1996 but continued to support the hospital and community as a committed monthly donor to Montage Health Foundation for the past 32 years. She is particularly passionate about giving in the areas of heart and cancer care, health conditions Ollie battled before his death in 2016 after 62 years of marriage. Her compassionate care for the community started through nursing and endures through her ongoing philanthropic support — and through the next generations of her family.

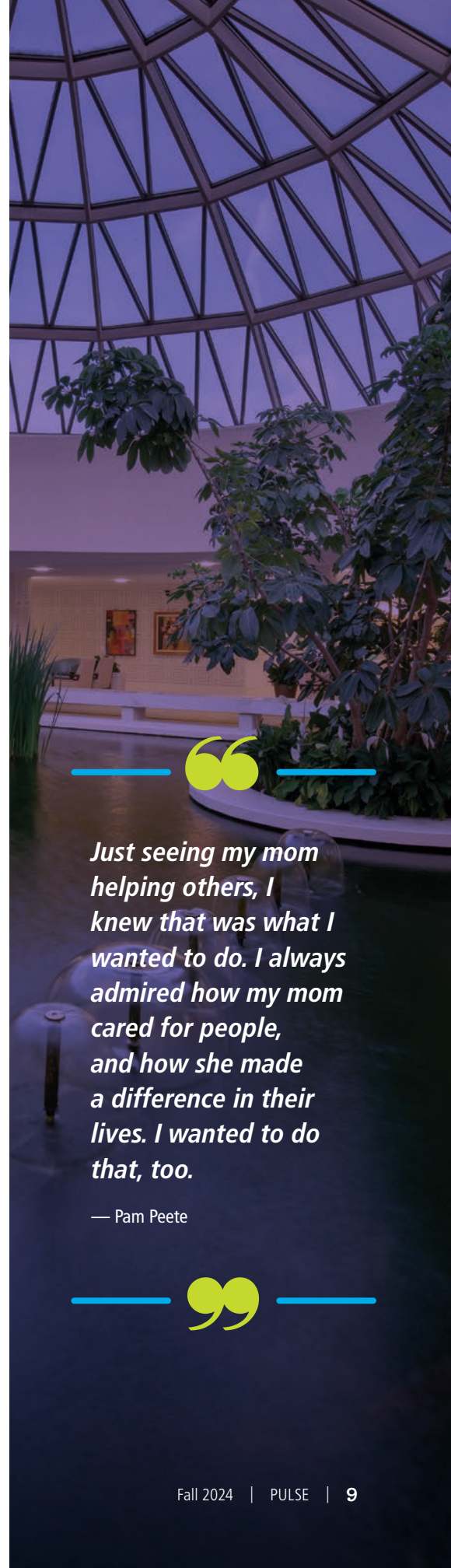
Hamilton's daughter, Pam Peete, started as a volunteer candy striper at Community Hospital. After taking courses at Monterey Peninsula College's Maurine Church Coburn School of Nursing, she began her own nursing career at the hospital. She later earned a master's degree in nursing education and became a nurse manager at a Southern California hospital.

"Just seeing my mom helping others, I knew that was what I wanted to do," Peete says. "I always admired how my mom cared for people, and how she made a difference in their lives. I wanted to do that, too."

The healthcare devotion also rubbed off on Peete's daughter and Hamilton's granddaughter, Jasmine Peete — at first in a show-and-tell kind of way.

"When my teacher asked me what I wanted to be, I made a shoebox, and it was of a hospital," Jasmine Peete says of an elementary school project. Now 24, she graduated in May 2024 from Montage Health Foundation's Minorities in Medicine program, gaining valuable experience shadowing Community Hospital doctors and receiving guidance and mentorship to help her pursue a career in healthcare.

Jasmine Peete aspires to be a doctor, following the healthcare path forged by her mother and grandmother. "Having the chance to help patients and walk down the same hospital halls that my mother and grandmother walked down during their careers has been pretty awesome."



*Just seeing my mom helping others, I knew that was what I wanted to do. I always admired how my mom cared for people, and how she made a difference in their lives. I wanted to do that, too.*

— Pam Peete





Dr. Elizabeth Clark and Alisha Ragland

## Community Hospital expands robot-assisted surgery program

**Alisha Ragland’s blood loss from fibroids in her uterus was so severe that she landed in Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula’s Emergency department — twice.**

The second time was only days before Ragland was scheduled for surgery to remove the growths. But her medical team at Community Hospital decided she couldn’t wait even those few days. Once Ragland was stabilized and her blood replenished through transfusions, Dr. Elizabeth Clark performed a hysterectomy with minimally invasive robot-assisted surgery, providing nearly instant relief.

“It’s really like a whole new lease on life,” Ragland says. “It was a chronic disease, but I’m lucky enough to have found a solution to immediately eliminate it from my life.”

Ragland went home a day after the surgery and bears only a few small scars on her abdomen, exhibiting the benefits associated with robot-assisted surgery: minimally invasive, small incisions, faster recovery, shorter hospital stays, less blood loss, and less pain than “open” surgery.

“For anyone suffering with uterine problems, don’t wait . . . don’t be afraid of the surgery,” Ragland says. “They’ve got it dialed in. There’s no reason to suffer with these menstrual issues when something so easy exists to let us reclaim our lives.”

Hysterectomies are among more than a dozen robot-assisted procedures offered at Community Hospital. The robotic program began in 2019, focusing on gynecology and urology. It has grown in the number and types of procedures, as surgeons with expertise in other areas have joined the medical staff or current members have undergone extensive training in robotics. To meet need and demand, a second robotic system was added in 2023.

“It really is the next level of the surgical experience,” says Dr. Steven Cabrales, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of Montage Health.



*It really is the next level of the surgical experience. It takes the skills that we use for standard laparoscopic surgery and then refines them so the patient actually has a better surgical experience with regard to pain and discomfort.*

— Dr. Steven Cabrales  
Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, Montage Health





“It takes the skills that we use for standard laparoscopic surgery and then refines them so the patient actually has a better surgical experience with regard to pain and discomfort.”

Ragland’s surgery followed a diagnosis of uterine fibroids — growths made of muscle cells and connective tissue that can cause bleeding between periods, longer- or heavier-than-normal periods, and cramping. She had those symptoms to an extreme degree, with periods so heavy, long, and painful that she was unable to leave the house at times.

She was referred to Clark, an obstetrician/gynecologist with Montage Medical Group, and they decided a robot-assisted hysterectomy was her best option.

While Ragland was familiar with robot-assisted surgery, Clark says that’s not always the case.

“Some patients ask, ‘Well who’s controlling the robot?’” Clark says. “I say, ‘Don’t worry. The robot doesn’t do anything without my permission. I’m the one in control.’ Most of them think it’s really cool.”

In robot-assisted surgery, the surgeon operates from a console, controlling the four arms of the “robot.” One of the arms has a state-of-the-art camera, providing high-definition, 3D images of the surgical area. The other arms have tiny surgical instruments. Each is inserted into the body through a small incision. The tools exactly mimic the hand and wrist movements of the surgeon in real time.

Cabrales says there is less pressure, tension, and torque from the instruments than with traditional laparoscopy.

“The robot puts the moveable part at the very tip of the instrument, so it’s essentially only the ‘fingertips’ that are doing any of the motions,” he says. “There’s a significant reduction in the amount of pressure on the abdomen wall and that makes a difference in post-operative pain and recovery.”

In Ragland’s case, Clark detached the uterus, placed it inside a specimen collection bag in Ragland’s abdomen, then brought the bag to the belly-button incision. While it was in the bag, she cut the uterus into strips small enough to be safely removed through the small incision.

Ragland’s uterus had become so enlarged it would have been difficult to remove through traditional laparoscopic surgery, Clark says.

*“When you have a really complicated case, that’s where robotics shines,” she says.*

*“I think our patients are really happy with the outcomes. We’re able to do the more complicated surgeries and offer a better recovery with less pain.”*

Cabrales says lung surgery for procedures including lung tumor removal will be the next area added in the robotics program.

“We’re constantly looking at ways of adopting laparoscopic techniques with the robot,” he says.

“People were leaving the community to go to Stanford and UCSF. They asked, ‘How come you can’t do it here?’ We can and we did, and now we’re reversing the trend, so people can continue to get the best care they need right here.”

## Robot-assisted surgeries at Community Hospital

### GENERAL SURGERIES

- Hernia repair
- Gallbladder removal
- Colon removal
- Weight loss (bariatric)

### UROLOGIC SURGERIES

- Prostate cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Ureteral cancer
- Bladder cancer
- Urinary blockages
- Urinary reconstruction

### GYNECOLOGIC SURGERIES

- Fibroids
- Endometriosis
- Abnormal or heavy bleeding
- Cancer
- Pelvic prolapse
- Ovarian cysts or masses

## Benefits of robot-assisted surgery



Faster recovery



Fewer and smaller scars



Shorter hospital stays



Reduced infection risk



Less pain and bleeding



Greater precision



Meet our surgeons and learn more: [montagehealth.org/robotic-surgery](https://montagehealth.org/robotic-surgery)



## Heroes unite to restart the heart of a cardiac arrest victim



**Bob Alspaugh adores his family. Relishes every second he gets to spend with them: Peggy, his wife of 57 years, daughter Catherine, sons Zachary and Justin, and grandchildren Zander and Monica.** The 77-year-old part-time Carmel resident is particularly fond of time spent gathered around the dinner table, especially during the holidays.

"We've had a lot of good Christmases together," Alspaugh says. "I've gotten a lot of good Christmas gifts."

Elizabeth Nelson

But nothing like the gift he received at the end of 2023. He tells the story best.

"On December 22, 2023, I went over to The Beach Club [at Pebble Beach], as I normally do. I swim three times a week. When I got there, the lanes were full, so I sat down, and there was a man sitting in a chaise next to me. A lane came available, and I said, 'Why don't you go ahead?' And he said, 'No, you go ahead.'"

Alspaugh began his laps.

"I don't know how long I was swimming. But based on my FitBit [exercise tracker], I was probably toward the end of my workout, which is normally about an hour. I don't remember anything. I was floating."

Face down.

"Somebody in my wife's water aerobics group saw me floating and said, 'He's not breathing.' My wife starts screaming. They had to drag me out, a 210-pound guy, and get me on deck. There was a man there who was an EMT. And there was Bryce, who teaches swimming lessons at the club. And someone went to get an AED [automated external defibrillator]."

That person with the AED was Elizabeth Nelson, a labor and delivery nurse at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula's Family Birth Center, who just happened to be in the kiddie pool with her sister and a handful of kids.

Her sister's husband, Jordan Smith, a firefighter, was also there. And that man Alspaugh met on the chaise before he jumped in the pool? A cardiologist.

"Whatever you want to call it — divine intervention or just pure luck — I'll take them all," Alspaugh muses.

Nelson says a woman came by asking if there was a doctor at the club. They saw Alspaugh laying on his back on the pool deck. She and Jordan instantly joined the rescue effort.

"There were already four or five people there," Nelson says.



Elizabeth Nelson and Jordan Smith



*Somebody in my wife's water aerobics group saw me floating and said, 'He's not breathing.' My wife starts screaming. They had to drag me out, a 210-pound guy, and get me on deck. There was a man there who was an EMT. And there was Bryce, who teaches swimming lessons at the club. And someone went to get an AED [automated external defibrillator].*

— Bob Alspaugh





"There was one man near me who said he was a doctor."

Everyone checked for a pulse. Nothing. Jordan started compressions. Then from somewhere, an AED arrived.

Nelson grabbed a nearby towel, dried Alspaugh's chest, then attached the sticky AED pads. After the machine ran its diagnostics, the moment arrived.

"Push button," the device said.

Nelson did. Once. Jordan did another round of compressions. At last, a pulse.

"Pretty amazing," Nelson says. "The earlier you start compressions, and the earlier you get an AED, the better the chances for a good outcome."

Nobody knows for sure why Alspaugh had the cardiac arrest.

"All we know is my heart stopped beating," he says. "It just stopped."

**Alspaugh was transferred to Community Hospital and later discharged. Subsequent tests didn't reveal any significant concerns. He's swimming again. Golfing. Walking. And, of course, celebrating those he loves the most.**

One request, though, for this year's holidays.

"I'm wishing for a peaceful and uneventful family Christmas."

## Beyond the hospital's walls

"Elizabeth Nelson is one of Montage Health's 3,000 amazing staff members making a difference in our community," says Dr. Steven Packer, Montage Health President and CEO. "She is a wonderful ambassador for the work we do and an example of how care and compassion extend far beyond the walls of our hospital."

Nelson's intervention in Alspaugh's collapse came slightly more than a year after Dr. Steven Lome, a Montage Medical Group cardiologist, saved the lives of two runners during the 2022 Monterey Bay Half Marathon. After one runner suffered a cardiac arrest on mile three of the marathon, Lome, who was also running the race, performed CPR until the runner received a lifesaving shock from an AED.

Lome continued running once the patient was safe, and as he crossed the finish line, he witnessed a second runner collapse from cardiac arrest. Lome administered CPR until the runner received a lifesaving shock from an AED provided by Community Hospital's nearby medical tent.

**"Our staff are embedded in the community we serve," Packer says. "Whether it's providing care in a clinical setting or enjoying a day at the pool, we're always here for our community."**

# What is cardiac arrest?

During cardiac arrest, the heart suddenly stops beating normally, reducing blood flow to the brain and other vital organs.

The abrupt loss of normal heart function is often characterized by:



**SUDDEN COLLAPSE**



**NO BREATHING**



**LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS**



**NO PULSE**



Cardiac arrest victims must be treated within minutes for a chance to survive.

Chances of survival decrease by 10 percent with every minute that passes after collapse.

## YOU CAN SAVE THE LIFE OF A CARDIAC ARREST VICTIM BY:

**Recognizing signs and symptoms of cardiac arrest**

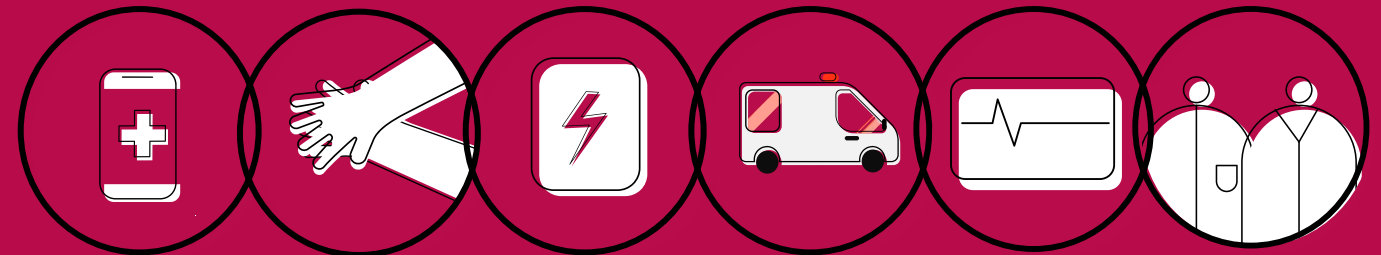
**Calling 911**

**Using an AED**

The user follows voice prompts and visual aids. An AED will not administer a shock unless the victim has a "shockable" rhythm.

**Performing CPR**

Survival rates double when cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is performed prior to first responder arrival.



Learn where you can get CPR-certified, plus more AED resources from Tyler Heart Institute's AED program:

**montagehealth.org/aed**





Dina Ruiz and Morgan Eastwood

## Assessing inherited cancer risk empowers patients to make informed — sometimes lifesaving — health decisions

When writer, speaker, and former television news anchor Dina Ruiz talked to a journalism class at California State University, Monterey Bay, she impressed upon her young audience the message that **knowledge truly is power**. And she has a potentially life-saving story to illustrate her point.

About two years ago, Dr. Daniel Luba, a gastroenterologist and internal medicine specialist, introduced Dina to a nonprofit he started called Project DNA. It creates simple screening protocols to identify people who might have inherited gene mutations that increase risk for cancers including breast, ovarian, prostate, pancreatic, colon, uterine, and melanoma.

Luba also co-directs Montage Health's Genetic Risk Assessment program with Dr. Lulu Zhang, a hematology and medical oncology specialist. Launched in 2022 with grant support from Montage Health Foundation for a pilot, the program empowers Monterey County residents — like Dina — and their relatives to make informed decisions about screenings and treatments for inherited cancers through risk assessment and genetic testing.

"One out of every 25 to 50 people has a genetic mutation that increases cancer risk," Luba says. "People can take steps to help prevent that cancer from developing or catch the cancer at a curable stage."

Dina, then 57, has a history of gastric (stomach) cancer on both



*One out of every 25 to 50 people has a genetic mutation that increases cancer risk. People can take steps to help prevent that cancer from developing or catch the cancer at a curable stage.*

— Dr. Daniel Luba  
Gastroenterologist and internal medicine specialist



sides of her family and had recently lost her mother to the disease. She decided to get screened.

She went to Montage Health's Carol Hatton Breast Care Center, where every patient who gets a mammogram can receive a risk assessment and subsequent genetic testing through the Genetic Risk Assessment program if screening results indicate an increased risk.

Dina's initial screening indicated an increased cancer risk, as expected due to her family history of gastric cancer. But she was surprised to learn that she had the BRCA2 gene, a mutation that dramatically increases risk for breast and ovarian cancers.

*"A few weeks after I took the genetic test," Dina says, "I was notified that I tested positive for the BRCA2 mutation. I went to my car and cried for 5 minutes. Then, with this knowledge, I felt extremely empowered to be able to get a hold on this before I developed cancer. What a gift."*

Dina called her daughter, Morgan Eastwood, then 25, to let her know. Because of her own results, her daughter had a 50 percent chance of also having the mutation.

Morgan took the test, and the results were the same: She also carries the BRCA2 mutation.

"The results were shocking," Morgan says. "But we have empowered ourselves with this information. My mom and I are great about keeping up with our health and visiting our doctors, so we looked at the information as a blessing, something we can get in front of and take care of before anything bad manifests."

Two months after Dina learned she has the BRCA2 mutation, she underwent preventive surgery and had her ovaries removed.

"They found a cyst on my right ovary the size of an egg but no cancer cells," she says. "How lucky am I?"

In the meantime, while Morgan has decisions to make about the preventive measures she will take, she is first experiencing the rites of passage the same preventive surgery would eliminate. She and her husband welcomed their first child in September and hope to have at least one more before she has her ovaries removed.

"I have to start thinking about some major decisions," says Morgan, now 27, "including a possible mastectomy. It's a lot to think about but I'm grateful to be aware so I can make proactive decisions about my health."

# Cancer screening recommendations

Screening tests check for signs of a health problem before you experience symptoms. Regular screenings can help you detect cancer early, when it's most treatable. The screenings you need depend on your age, gender, family health history, and other factors.



## Ages 25–39

- Cervical cancer screenings



## Ages 40–44

- Breast cancer screenings for women
- Cervical cancer screenings



## Ages 45–64

- Breast cancer screenings for women
- Cervical cancer screenings
- Colon and rectal cancer screenings



## Ages 65+

- Breast cancer screenings for women
- Colon and rectal cancer screenings

## Breast cancer screenings

Women should get mammograms every one to two years starting at age 40, or as instructed by their doctor.

## Cervical cancer screenings

The American Cancer Society's general screening guidelines say that women between ages 25 and 65 should have a Pap test every three years or a combined Pap and HPV test every five years. For those older than 65:

- If you've had regular cervical cancer testing with normal results, you no longer need to be screened
- If you have a history of cervical precancer, continue to get tested for at least 20 years after that diagnosis

## Colon and rectal cancer screenings

At age 45, men and women at average risk should begin colorectal cancer screenings. Options include:

- Colonoscopy performed every 10 years or as instructed by a doctor
- CT colonography performed every five years or as instructed by a doctor
- Fecal immunochemical test (FIT) performed yearly or as instructed by a doctor
- FIT-DNA test performed every three years or as instructed by a doctor
- Sigmoidoscopy performed every five years or as instructed by a doctor



## Assess your cancer risk

Take a short survey to identify your cancer risk factors and get a recommended prevention plan.

Take the survey at [montagehealth.org/genetics](https://montagehealth.org/genetics)



Learn more about cancer care, screening, and Genetic Risk Assessment at Montage Health: [montagehealth.org/cancer](https://montagehealth.org/cancer)



Raul Rico, Fatima Rico, and Melissa Sosa

## A family's mental health journey leads to a passion for advocacy

**For years, Melissa Sosa and Raul Rico searched for an answer to the distress of their daughter Fatima.** She was struggling to cope with stressful medical issues and faced bullying at school. Anxiety and panic attacks made daily life painful. Persistent requests to the school for help went unanswered.

Sosa and Rico knew Fatima desperately needed help. They just didn't know what that help looked like or how to find it — until Fatima's pediatrician referred her to Ohana, Montage Health's mental health program for Monterey County youth and their families.

That's where they were introduced to Julieta Ortiz, an Ohana social worker and family care manager who Sosa says has been a "light in the darkness." Ortiz started by addressing those calls for help that went unanswered at school.

"As soon as Julieta got involved there was a change in the way the school treated us," Sosa says. "They started listening to us and paying attention to our concerns."

Sosa's persistent attempts to advocate for her daughter were finally being heard.

Working with the family's primary care doctor and an Ohana psychiatrist, Ortiz helped Sosa and Rico establish an individualized education plan for Fatima. That has made a big difference in quality of life at school, says Fatima, who is 13. At the same time, Sosa addressed Fatima's bullying issues. Meeting with school staff, they helped Fatima resolve her social issues one by one.

"At first I was afraid that people would call me a snitch or tattletale, so I didn't tell anyone I was struggling," Fatima says. "Thanks to Julieta we were able to communicate to the school about the problems I've had. It felt like a storm that had happened for a long time finally was gone and sunshine arrived. I can advocate for myself and handle a lot



*Ever since I can remember, I've had issues concentrating and getting my thoughts together. Being an adult man, I felt ashamed to talk about it. But when Fatima got help at Ohana, that gave me the courage to get help, too. It felt like a load was taken off my shoulders.*

— Raul Rico



of my issues on my own now.”

Ortiz helped the family find Fatima therapy services in the community, and since parents are also included in treatment at Ohana, Rico was able to receive support that addressed issues he had struggled with his entire life.

“Ever since I can remember, I’ve had issues concentrating and getting my thoughts together,” he says. “Being an adult man, I felt ashamed to talk about it. But when Fatima got help at Ohana, that gave me the courage to get help, too. It felt like a load was taken off my shoulders.”

### Breaking the stigma

Fatima and her parents say their experience at Ohana has been empowering, and they are determined to lift others on their path toward mental health, resilience, and breaking stigmas about seeking help.

“Melissa is a fierce advocate and very passionate about breaking mental health stigma, especially in the Latinx community,” Ortiz says. “She had all the ambition and drive to advocate for Fatima — I just helped her

understand her rights and empowered her to use resources that enabled her to advocate and make her family’s voice heard. Now she’s helping other parents have their voices heard, too.”

Still fresh on their own mental and emotional well-being journeys, they want to help others access the same support that made such a difference in their lives.

“In our culture, every time the word social worker is mentioned, it’s kind of a taboo,” Sosa says. “Going to a therapist is not normal. We don’t talk about it. But by not talking about it, I was damaging my daughter more than helping her. Let’s break these stereotypes because mental health is very important. Our children reflect our behavior. Let’s not normalize our behaviors if they cause emotional harm.”

Fatima calls her mom her hero.

*“My mom has not only fought for me and my mental health but also for other people in the community,” Fatima says. “I look up to her. To kids my age who are also struggling, don’t be afraid to get help. You don’t need to go through it alone. Just tell someone and get help.”*

## Habits that build mental fitness



### Social connection

Try to hang out with a friend in person outside of school at least once per week.



### Exercise

Aim for 60 minutes (total) or more of physical activity every day.



### Nutrition

Aim for a balanced diet each day that includes protein, carbohydrates, fats, and ample water.



### Time in nature

Aim for at least 2 hours per week in nature.



### Sleep

Aim for the same bedtime and wake-up time each day.



### Relaxation and rejuvenation

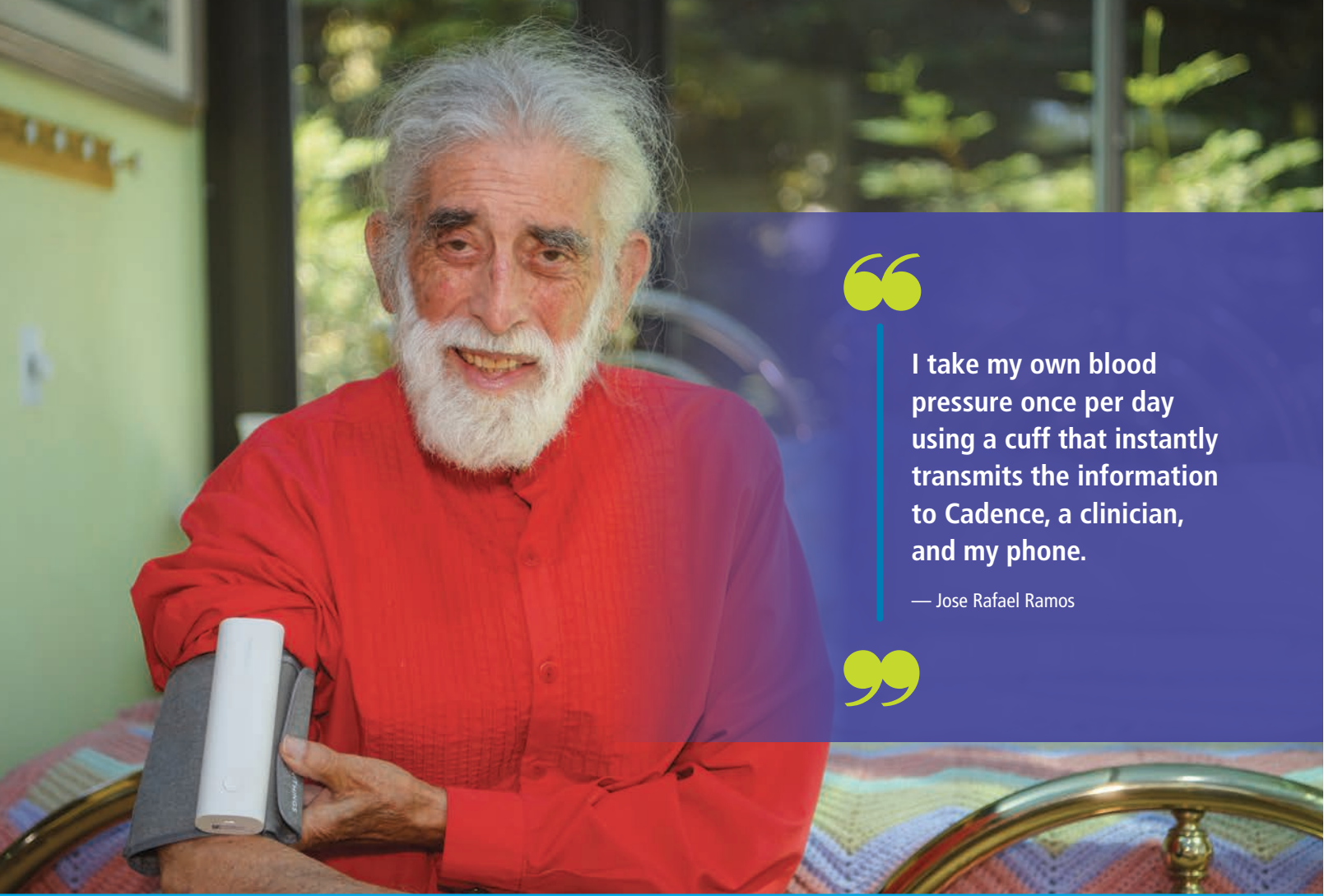
Aim for at least 30 minutes of downtime each day.



*In our culture, every time the word social worker is mentioned, it’s kind of a taboo. Going to a therapist is not normal. We don’t talk about it. But by not talking about it, I was damaging my daughter more than helping her. Let’s break these stereotypes because mental health is very important. Our children reflect our behavior. Let’s not normalize our behaviors if they cause emotional harm. — Melissa Sosa*



Find more mental health tips and resources for the whole family:  
[montagehealth.org/ohana](https://montagehealth.org/ohana)



I take my own blood pressure once per day using a cuff that instantly transmits the information to Cadence, a clinician, and my phone.

— Jose Rafael Ramos



## At-home vital sign monitoring helps Montage Medical Group patients stay ahead of health trouble

Jose Rafael Ramos can't say for sure whether an innovative at-home health monitoring system saved his life earlier this year, but the Montage Medical Group patient does know he is alive to tell the story as he approaches his 90th birthday in February.

Ramos was at his Monterey home on January 31, 2024, when he discovered that his blood pressure was dangerously high. An at-home health monitoring system,

provided through Montage Health's Connected Care program, detected the potential crisis.

Since 2023, Montage Health's Connected Care program has partnered with Cadence, an organization staffed by advanced practice providers, nurses, and other medical professionals, to remotely monitor the vital signs of enrolled Montage Medical Group patients with heart failure, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes.

"I take my own blood pressure once per day using a

cuff that instantly transmits the information to Cadence, a clinician, and my phone," Ramos explains. When he saw the high reading, he proactively called Cadence's emergency number and spoke to a nurse whose incident report states that while on the phone, "the patient exhibited labored breathing."

The nurse called 911. Emergency medical services responded to Ramos's home and transported him to the Emergency department at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula. He showed signs of distress but was soon stabilized.

"This could have ended very differently without such a swift response," says Pablo Veliz, Ramos's primary care doctor at Montage Medical Group. "If your blood pressure readings are out of range, you're at increased risk for a stroke and heart attack. This active monitoring system gives us feedback a lot sooner so we can initiate treatment faster. It's been a game-changer."

The outcome couldn't have been better for Ramos, his wife Yvonne, their six adult children, and six grandchildren. The retired Monterey County land use attorney is a published author, a regular contributor to a local monthly humor publication, *Foolish Times*, exercises three to four times per week at a local gym, and is glad to soon be celebrating his 90th birthday with his family.

### Innovating to serve more patients with high-quality healthcare

Rapid response — though rarely needed — is just one benefit of the at-home health monitoring system. The increased frequency of biomedical data it provides helps improve management of chronic illnesses by giving healthcare providers information to address issues before they become a crisis. And since these patients don't have to leave their homes, patients who need face-to-face care have increased access to in-person appointments.

Since the program launched last year, nearly 1,000 patients have enrolled, providing an average of six vital readings per week. By partnering with the clinicians at Cadence for remote vital sign monitoring, Montage Medical Group providers can focus more time on direct patient care.

The Connected Care program is only available to certain patients, but Montage Medical Group hopes to expand access soon and is looking into remote monitoring for other conditions including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).



This could have ended very differently without such a swift response. If your blood pressure readings are out of range, you're at increased risk for a stroke and heart attack. This active monitoring system gives us feedback a lot sooner so we can initiate treatment faster. It's been a game-changer.

— Dr. Pablo Veliz  
Primary care doctor  
Montage Medical Group



# Know the meanings of blood pressure readings

Blood pressure category	Systolic mm Hg (upper number)	and/or	Diastolic mm Hg (lower number)	What to do
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80	Continue heart-healthy habits like eating well and exercising.
Elevated	120–129	and	Less than 80	Talk to your doctor about controlling your blood pressure.
High blood pressure (hypertension) stage 1	130–139	or	80–89	Your doctor will likely prescribe lifestyle changes like dietary adjustments and exercise. Medication may be considered based on risk.
High blood pressure (hypertension) stage 2	140 or higher	or	90 or higher	Your doctor will prescribe blood pressure medication and lifestyle changes like eating more fruits and vegetables, less fat, and moving more.
Hypertensive crisis (consult your doctor immediately)	Higher than 180	and/or or	Higher than 120	Wait 5 minutes after your first reading, then take your blood pressure again. If your readings are still unusually high, contact your doctor immediately.

## CALL 911 IF YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE IS HIGHER THAN 180/120 AND YOU HAVE:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Back pain
- Numbness
- Weakness
- Change in vision
- Difficulty speaking

# At Healthy Youth Field Day, exercising and eating right have never been so fun

Back in the day — way back — there was no Xbox, no Instagram, no Snapchat. No Minecraft, TikTok, Alexa. The only thing getting your attention on a free day from school was your mom yelling, “Go outside and play. Now!”

You hopped aboard your Sting-Ray bicycle (clothespins holding the playing cards tight to the spokes for maximum surround sound), rode to the nearest dirt-patch baseball field, and you didn’t come home until

dusk was closing in and the streetlights came on.

Today, the couch cushions are indented, the phones are always the newest model, and gaming is a career.

So earlier this year, Aspire Health and Montage Health Foundation decided to turn back the kid clock with the second-annual Healthy Youth Field Day at Cardinale Stadium, home of the Monterey Bay Football Club professional soccer team.

*It’s very fulfilling to hear the unbridled joy kids have when they’re engaged in active play, not a screen in sight, no bent necks looking at phones. It’s reminiscent of many of our childhoods. Being outside all day, coming back dirty, sweaty, your clothes torn. The sign of a good day.*

— Tyler Munson, Chief Executive Officer, Aspire Health





"It's very fulfilling to hear the unbridled joy kids have when they're engaged in active play, not a screen in sight, no bent necks looking at phones," says Tyler Munson, Chief Executive Officer of Aspire Health. "It's reminiscent of many of our childhoods. Being outside all day, coming back dirty, sweaty, your clothes torn. The sign of a good day."

Healthy Youth Field Day, which had its inaugural event last year, brings together Monterey County kids and classrooms that participate in Aspire Health's Don't Feed the Diabetes school education curriculum, as well as Montage Health's Kids Eat Right program.

Both programs provide fun, engaging education in schools and the community that teaches kids and families healthy lifestyle habits like eating right and exercising to avoid chronic health issues such as diabetes and obesity.

"I said, 'Did you know you're going to play with Monterey Bay Football Club players today?'" says Yasmine Elsherbini, Director of Community Health and Wellness in Aspire's Population Health division. "And one kid said, 'I know, I'm going to go easy on them.'"

The interaction with the Monterey Bay Football Club players was the "1" part of the American Academy of Pediatrics "5210" framework — 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables, 2 hours or less of recreational screen time, 1 hour of physical exercise, and 0 sugary drinks — that guided the day's activities, which were funded by Montage Health Foundation.

"A key pillar of the foundation's grant-making strategy is to strengthen community health," says Carrie Creasey, Community Engagement Officer for Montage Health Foundation. "Diabetes and pre-diabetes have been identified as some of the top health issues in Monterey County. We want to build programs that address this health issue and make them accessible at no cost. We're proud to be a partner."

During this year's field day, the foundation operated stop "2," complete with bubbles, to keep young minds off their cell phones.

"I love that our team can feel that direct connection to the work that we're supporting in the community," Creasey says. "I was at the bubble station and one boy actually said, 'This is the most fun I've ever had.'"

Sounds like something from way back in the day.

## Healthy habits start early

Aspire Health creates fun and engaging education for kids using pediatrician-recommended and family-focused approaches to inspire lifelong healthy habits.

### Don't Feed the Diabetes

Aspire's free diabetes education program for Monterey County classrooms takes children of all ages on a journey that explores what type 2 diabetes is, what causes it, prevention tips, and setting SMART goals — specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

### Healthy Together

Aspire's pediatric wellness program is led by expert health and well-being coaches at no cost to eligible families with six engaging session topics:

- Healthy plate
- Screen time, stress, and sleep
- Get active
- Sugar smart
- Meal planning and cooking
- SMART goal setting



Learn your diabetes risk and find out more about Aspire Health: [aspirehealth.org](https://aspirehealth.org)



## Practice 5210 every day



5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables



2 hours or less of recreational screen time



1 hour or more of physical activity



0 sugary drinks, more water





*DAX knows exactly where to place things in a doctor's notes. It knows if we're discussing the history of the patient, it knows if we're discussing their physical exam, when to add something to the patient's medication list. It's much more powerful than just making a transcript of the visit.*

— Dr. Mark Carvalho, Chief Executive Officer, Montage Medical Group



## New listening technology lets doctors focus more on their patients and less on taking notes

Doctors at Montage Medical Group are reporting that new technology they are testing is reducing the need for “pajama time” — a not-so-affectionate nickname physicians use to describe late-night hours dutifully spent transferring their daily notes into patient medical records.

Since April 2024, about 25 Montage Medical Group primary care doctors and specialists have been testing DAX Copilot, recording technology with artificial intelligence that transcribes doctor-patient conversations into concise and accurate medical notes for patient charts.

“The workload for doctors has dramatically increased over the years,” says Dr. Mark Carvalho, Chief Executive Officer of Montage Medical Group. “There simply are not enough hours in the day for doctors to do everything they need to do. And note-taking is a very important but very time-consuming task. With

DAX Copilot, we’re proactively taking steps toward helping our doctors avoid burnout.”

The technology — used only with the patient’s consent — reduces the need for doctors to manually take notes during a patient’s appointment or spend their evening hours typing their notes into a patient record.

“We’re still working on making the technology concise, making it do exactly what we want, so every single thing is accurate,” says Michael McGlue, one of the Montage Medical Group doctors piloting the technology. “But every iteration we’ve seen of DAX is better than the last, so we’re moving in the right direction at exponential speed.”

The listening system uses a template customized by Montage Medical Group doctors to create the notes the way they want.

“Our template teaches DAX to capture only those parts of the conversation that are medically relevant,” McGlue explains. “Patients might talk to me about where they went on their vacation, how their family is doing, those sorts of things. The template we’ve set up doesn’t make notes about parts of the conversation that are an important part of our visit but are medically nonessential, which is pretty amazing.”

The technology then translates the relevant information into notes, which the doctor reviews for accuracy before uploading the notes into the patient’s chart.

“DAX knows exactly where to place things in a doctor’s notes,” Carvalho says. “It knows if we’re



discussing the history of the patient, it knows if we’re discussing their physical exam, when to add something to the patient’s medication list. It’s much more powerful than just making a transcript of the visit.”

Another major benefit, McGlue says, is that DAX enables doctors to focus more intently on conversations with patients in real time.

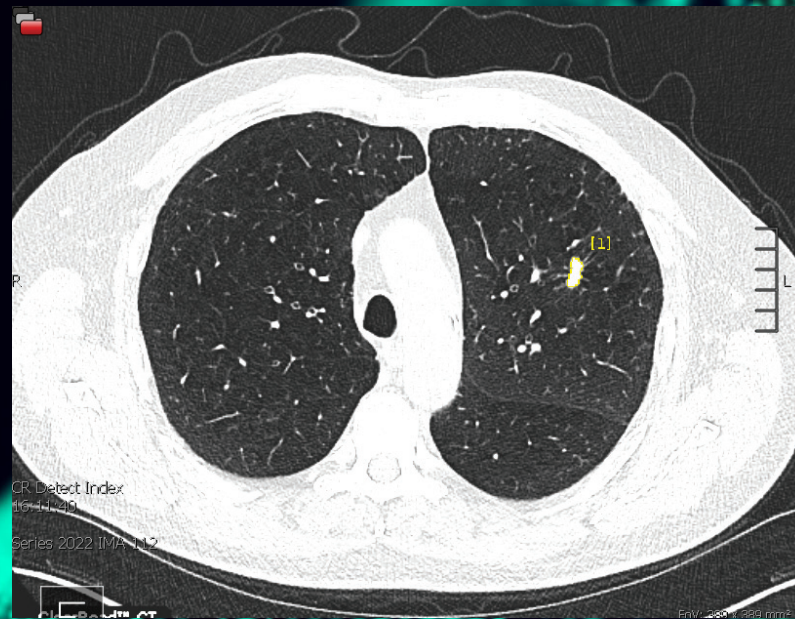
“I don’t have to type or write anything while in the patient room,” he says. “I can listen to the patient, discuss whatever problems they’re experiencing, and be more present.”

This technology is a win for doctors and patients, Carvalho says.

*“Our doctors can spend more time focused directly on conversations with their patients, and they get to have more time at home with their families.”*

# New CT scan technology helps radiologists catch more potentially cancerous lung masses sooner

## ABNORMALITY IN A TRADITIONAL CT SCAN



## ABNORMALITY WITH CLEAR VISUAL INTELLIGENCE



**White dots in a sea of black** — at its most basic, that's what radiologists are looking for when they review CT chest scans for nodules that could be a sign of cancer.

But, of course, it's not that simple. Those white dots can be obscured by blood vessels and bone, which are also white in the sea of black. To help cut through that visual clutter, radiologists at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula are now using an artificial intelligence-driven software that suppresses the bone and blood vessels in the images, giving unobstructed views of any nodules.

*"There are certain areas within the lungs where identifying nodules is more challenging," says Dr. Anthony Filly, a radiologist at Community Hospital. The software "can actually subtract out the vessels leaving only the nodules behind. It can definitely make a big difference in recognizing nodules in these regions."*

Doctors order CT (computed tomography) scans to help identify lung diseases and conditions such as cancer, blood clots, or damage caused by smoking. Annual scans are recommended for current or former smokers who meet certain criteria because early detection can make a significant difference in survival rates.

It's not unusual to find nodules in a CT chest scan: The American Thoracic Society estimates that nodules are found in up to half of adults who get an X-ray or CT scan. Most are "medically insignificant," Filly says, meaning they aren't causing any issues.

What radiologists are looking for, he says, are those that are suspicious — because of size, shape, or changes over time. The new software is also useful for that, he says, because it not only measures the size, but also calculates the volume of nodules that are detected.

The software, ClearRead™ CT with Clear Visual Intelligence™, is made by Riverain Technologies and is being used at healthcare facilities including Veterans Administration hospitals and large healthcare systems like Cedars-Sinai in Southern California and the University of California San Diego Health.

"The benefit to patients is the increased sensitivity [of the software], the ability to find the nodules that are in areas that are really problematic," Filly says.

That increased sensitivity is crucial, Filly says, because it ultimately empowers doctors to catch more nodules, and catch them earlier, leading to better health outcomes for patients.

Filly estimates that the technology saves radiologists a few minutes per scan, and with an increasing demand for radiology services, that can amount to significant amounts of time saved every day.

"It's nice for us from a time-saving standpoint," he says. "But more than that, it's the sensitivity and being able to up your level of confidence that you're finding the ones that are really subtle that the human eye may have more trouble perceiving."

**A doctor's referral is required for CT scans at Community Hospital and Montage Health's other radiology and imaging facilities. When you receive an order from your doctor, call (831) 649-7231 to schedule your test.**



## Understanding care options for pressing medical needs

### PRIMARY CARE, 24/7 EVISITS, URGENT CARE, THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT — HOW DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO GO WHEN MEDICAL NEEDS ARISE?

**Imagine. You awaken at 3 a.m. in the throes of what feels like an ear infection.** You trip on the way to your mailbox and make angels in the asphalt. Your child slides into home plate on Saturday afternoon and dislocates his elbow. Whom do you call and where can you go for care?



#### Primary care: The first line of defense

“Primary care doctors know their patients best and are best equipped to address most of their patients’ needs,” says Dr. Mark Carvalho, Chief Executive Officer of Montage Medical Group. “If it isn’t an emergency and

you don’t need immediate attention, your primary care doctor’s office should be the first place you call, even if it’s after hours. They know your health history, current conditions, health goals, and other needs.”

Despite Montage Medical Group’s roster of more than 100 providers, Carvalho acknowledges that establishing care for new patients can be difficult due to a nationwide doctor shortage, including here in Monterey County.

“Our physician, nurse practitioner, and physician assistant recruitment efforts have been robust and successful,” Carvalho says, “and we’re continuing to recruit more doctors and advanced practice providers to meet our community’s need and increase access to care.”



#### 24/7 eVisit: Your own personal doctor

For patients who can’t miss time from work, face challenges with transportation, or don’t have a primary care doctor, access to care is just a smartphone away for many minor health issues.

Montage Health’s 24/7 eVisit service is available to anyone for a flat fee of \$25 or less, regardless of insurance coverage. The service can address issues that don’t require an in-person examination such as allergies, skin problems, urinary tract infections, respiratory symptoms, mild digestive issues like constipation and diarrhea, and mild muscle pain like low back pain.

Patients can receive a diagnosis, treatment plan, prescription, or, if needed, a referral, all from the comfort of their home — or anywhere — using a computer or mobile device. During an eVisit, patients complete an online questionnaire about their symptoms, and within 10 minutes to 1 hour, they receive a response from a healthcare provider.



#### Fast and friendly urgent care

Mogo Urgent Care in Carmel, Marina, and Monterey provides high-quality in-person care for minor needs like stitches, X-rays, throat swabs, urine tests, and physical exams.

“We currently are seeing around 4,000 patients a month among our three clinics,” says Chris Stegge, Chief Operating Officer of MoGo Urgent Care. “We can provide X-rays on site, lab work, rapid tests for strep throat, flu, COVID-19, and pregnancy, and provide a test for urinary tract infections. And we can help you get to the next level of care, if necessary.”



#### When in doubt, go to the nearest emergency department

Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department for a life- or limb-threatening injury or illness. Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula’s Emergency department provides care for issues such as a heart attack, moderate to severe stomach pain, severe headaches, and new neurological symptoms like numbness, tingling, slurred speech, and fainting.

*“Patients who think they are truly having a medical emergency need to go to the emergency department,” Carvalho says. “For chest pain, trouble breathing, bleeding, symptoms of stroke, a kidney stone, or broken bones, the emergency department is the place to go. But for problems like a cough or sore throat, these routine issues can be managed by a primary care doctor, 24/7 eVisit, or MoGo.”*

# Know where to go

## Primary care provider [montagehealth.org/doctors](https://montagehealth.org/doctors)

- Knows your medical history and can provide personalized advice and guidance
- May offer video visits or same-day appointments



## 24/7 eVisit

### [montagehealth.org/evisit](https://montagehealth.org/evisit)

- On-demand care from the comfort of your home
- Response within 1 hour (usually much faster)

## MoGo Urgent Care

### [mogourgentcare.org](https://mogourgentcare.org)

- Assesses and treats minor illnesses and injuries in person
- Walk in or make an appointment at locations in Carmel, Marina, and Monterey

## WHEN TO SEEK URGENT CARE



- Allergies
- Colds, coughs, flu, fever
- Dizziness
- Migraine
- Minor burns
- Minor car accidents (low speed, air bags did not deploy)
- Minor cuts
- Minor injuries such as a sprain
- Nausea
- Need for stitches
- Pink eye
- Rash
- Sore throat
- Urinary tract infections
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea

## Emergency care

### Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department when you:

- Have a life- or limb-threatening emergency
- Believe that your condition is an emergency
- Have severe symptoms that can't wait

## WHEN TO GET EMERGENCY CARE



- After swallowing poison
- Any loss of consciousness
- Bone fracture with open wound
- Car accident injuries (air bags deployed)
- Chest pain
- Choking
- Electric shock
- Fall from a significant height
- High fever that doesn't get better with medicine
- Seizure
- Serious head or neck injury
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe allergic reaction
- Severe burns
- Severe difficulty breathing
- Suspicion of exposure to a serious communicable disease
- Uncontrollable bleeding
- Unusual or bad headache

Learn about Montage Health's options for urgent health needs:  
[montagehealth.org/urgent](https://montagehealth.org/urgent)

# Elevating care together

At Montage Health Foundation, we're dedicated to transforming community health by advancing clinical innovation, enhancing patient care, and growing the next generation of healthcare heroes.

Your support can have a profound impact.  
Join us and make a difference today.

## 2023 IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



Granted **\$11 million** to enhance our community's healthcare services



Awarded **\$695,000 in scholarships** to Monterey County students exploring healthcare careers



Provided **82,000 volunteer hours** to enhance the patient experience

## VOLUNTEER

Share your time and talents to make a difference for patients.

[montagehealth.org/volunteer](https://montagehealth.org/volunteer)



## GIVE

Your donation supports critical programs and services that benefit our entire community.

[montagehealth.org/donate](https://montagehealth.org/donate)



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