

Richmond University Medical Center Announces New Hematology/Oncology Chiefs



Victoria Forte, MD



Calvin Han, MD

Richmond University Medical Center recently announced two new appointments to its Hematology/Oncology Department leadership team. Victoria Forte, MD, has been appointed as Chief of the Division of Hematology/Oncology, Cancer Service Line Director, and Fellowship Program Director. Joining her is Calvin Han, MD, as new Associate Chief of Hematology/Oncology.

“We are excited that Dr. Forte is returning to our institution and, at the same time, welcoming Dr. Han to our RUMC family,” President and Chief Executive Officer Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. “With their extensive knowledge and experience, Dr. Forte and Dr. Han will continue to expand our hematology/oncology programs, providing the highest level of quality care right here on Staten Island.”

A native Staten Island resident, Dr. Forte completed her hematology-oncology fellowship at the University of Southern California. There, she was awarded the Broad Stem Cell Clinical Scholars Grant. She presented her translational biomarker research in several conferences including the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and the American Association of Cancer Research (AACR). Prior to her time at USC, she was an internal medicine resident in Brooklyn at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, where she rotated through Kings County Hospital, the Brooklyn VA, and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. At MSKCC, she conducted several research projects in immunology and brain metastases. Additionally, she has been appointed to the board of the National

Cancer Institute’s Cancer IRB.

Dr. Forte’s prior positions include serving these same roles at New York City Health and Hospitals/ Kings County and as Northwell’s Cancer Institute’s Director of the Western Region. In addition, in her tenure as Medical Director at Puma Biotechnology, she was pivotal in the FDA approval of a novel HER2 targeted therapy in breast cancer.

“It’s an honor and privilege to be back at RUMC. I’m thrilled to lead an expanded cancer service line. The mission and vision is to provide high quality, comprehensive, personalized cancer care via a multidisciplinary care team, cutting edge therapeutics and compassionate care right here at home” said Dr. Forte. I’m exceptionally excited for the future of cancer care here in 2025 and beyond”

Like Dr. Forte, Dr. Han is also a native Staten Island resident. He graduated with distinction from Cornell University with a bachelor’s degree in microbiology after which he completed a Doctor of Medicine degree at St. Louis University School of Medicine. He went on to complete a residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in Hematology/Oncology both at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine Program.

Since 2010, Dr. Han has maintained his own hematology/oncology practice at the Yolanda G. Barco Oncology Institute in Meadville, Pennsylvania, where he has also been the Medical Director of Research and Professional Development and an Adjunct Clinical Professor at Lake Erie College of Medicine.

“I feel blessed to be coming back home and joining the RUMC team. My goal is to provide compassionate and excellent care to our community,” said Dr. Han.

The oncology program at Richmond University Medical Center has been nationally accredited by the American College of Surgeons’ Commission on Cancer since 1937, making it the longest continually accredited cancer care program on Staten Island.

From the President & CEO Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE



February is American Heart Month. I want to take a moment to recognize the incredible work of our Cardiovascular Department, led by our Chief of the department and president of our medical staff, Francesco Rotatori, MD, FACC. This talented and passionate group apply their technical skills day in and day out, providing the highest quality patient care from emergent services to chronic condition management.

Together with their colleagues in our Emergency Medicine Department, their skills and expertise, particularly in the care of congestive heart failure patients, have earned RUMC the “High Performing Hospital” designation from U.S. News and World Reports for three consecutive years.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women. One person dies every 33 seconds from cardiovascular disease. Coronary artery disease, or CAD, is the most common type of heart disease, affecting about 1 in 20 adults age 20 and older. In the United States, someone has a heart attack every 40 seconds, equating to about 805,000 people a year. Of these, 605,000 are a first-time heart attack and 200,000 happen to people who have already had a heart attack. Concerning of all, about 1 in 5 heart attacks are silent, meaning the damage is done, but the person is not aware of it.

The good news is that many risk factors for heart disease can be managed or prevented through lifestyle choices. Eating a balanced diet, staying physically active, managing stress, and prioritizing regular check-ups are just a few steps we can take to protect our hearts. The road to maintaining good heart health,

even if you have a cardiac condition, rests with how well we take care of our bodies.

Cardiovascular services continues to be a cornerstone of care at RUMC. We continue to make strategic investments to offer our community the latest technology, enroll in promising clinical trials, and explore new opportunities to expand our prevention services, condition management, emergency care, and cardiac rehabilitation programs. For our patients in need of advanced surgical interventions, including bypass and open heart surgery, our partnership with Mount Sinai Health System provides a direct gateway to some of the finest cardiovascular surgeons you will find anywhere in the world.

For us here at RUMC, the future is now. Our award winning Cardiovascular Department will soon be housed inside the new Joan and Alan Bernikow Heart and Vascular Institute. Scheduled to open next year, the new institute will feature a state-of-the-art recovery unit and hybrid cardiac catheterization lab allowing the center’s team to perform both angioplasty and neurovascular procedures. Housed within the lab will be new \$1.8 million biplane imaging technology.

So clearly, when it comes to matters of the heart, look no further than Richmond University Medical Center. Happy American Heart Month!

Remember the Power of One — You Make A Difference!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel J. Messina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer

Patient Satisfaction: A Note of Thanks

“We were given Sophia 3 days ago. It’s an amazing hospital. A very professional and friendly team. We would like to send a very big thank you to our great doctor, Eman Sultan. She was very professional and very kind with us as well as her professional team (Dr. Lau, an anesthesiologist Dr. Riso and our great nurses Julia and Christina). Also, we send a big thank you and appreciation to the team after delivery, they were all the best (doctors, nurses, housekeepers). Unfortunately, we do not remember the names. Finally, our great appreciation for Ms. Mena from the birth certificates department, she was very nice with us and gave us all the information, support and guidance to the next process.”

— Sherihan Mohamed and Gaafar El Helaly

“Dr. Rotatori and Marisa Semioli, NP, were just amazing. They took the time to help me understand things that were never clearly

explained to me before. That NP is going places! I can’t wait to say I knew her when.”

— Nancy Elkes

“I just got back from having a procedure at RUMC and I could not have been treated any better. From the moment I walked in, every staff member I encountered was friendly and competent. Nurse Kevin did my paperwork and checked me in. He was compassionate, professional, and made me feel at ease. All of the nurses that were part of my procedure were incredible (Allison, Lil, and Roseanne). They made sure I was comfortable both during the procedure and in recovery, and you can tell that they really care about their patients. My doctor (Dr. Yiachos) is excellent. He explained everything and came to see me after to let me know that everything went well. Thank you for making an unpleasant procedure so much easier!”

— Pamela

President and CEO Continues Distinguished Service on HANYS Board of Trustees



Dr. Messina (right) with RUMC Board of Trustees Chair Timothy C. Harrison at the recent opening of RUMC's new Women's Center for Obstetrics and Gynecology in the Charleston section of Staten Island.

Richmond University Medical Center President and Chief Executive Officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, will continue his service as a member of the Healthcare Association of New York State (HANYS) Board of Trustees. Dr. Messina, who has served on the board since 2017, brings over 30 years of experience in healthcare leadership to this vital role, where he continues to

contribute to shaping the future of healthcare in New York State. Dr. Messina's new term began on January 1, 2025.

Reflecting on his ongoing service with HANYS, Dr. Messina shared, "Leadership in healthcare is not just about making decisions today, but shaping a healthier future for generations to come."

HANYS represents the interests of nonprofit and public hospitals, health systems, and other care providers across New York State. Its Board of Trustees plays an integral role in guiding the organization's strategic priorities, advocating for policies that address key challenges in the healthcare sector, and ensuring the delivery of innovative and equitable care across the state. Board members collaborate on issues such as workforce development, fiscal sustainability, and improving healthcare equity. Dr. Messina is the only board member from Staten Island. Board members serve three-year terms.

In addition to his service on the HANYS Board of Trustees, Dr. Messina is also a member of the Board of the Greater New York Hospital Association, serves on the Policy Committee of the American Hospital Association, and is also on the board of several local organizations including the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation and the Wagner College DiVinci Society. Most recently, he was ranked No. 7 on City and State New York's 2024 Staten Island Power 100 List of the borough's most influential people.

Employee of the Month

Congratulations to our employee of the month for January:

Michelle Knubbert
Behavioral Health Coordinator
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science



This month's question:

What do you like to do to keep your heart healthy?



Stacey Ryan, *Patient Information*
"I keep my heart healthy by going for walks. I also enjoy eating salads."



Stephanie Donnellan, *Nurse Manager*
"I enjoy staying active by running and riding my Peloton. Running is my escape and my 'me time.'"



Claudia Beadle, *Cardiology EEG/EKG Tech*
"I like to go for walks after lunch to get some physical activity. A healthy diet is important to me, so I enjoy eating yogurt and a variety of fruits."



Paul Johnson, *Cardiac Cath Technician*
"I drink a lot of water; I eat a lot of salads and I'm a gym rat. I do a lot of cardio, and I don't take any medications."



Alyssa Forello, *Respiratory Therapist*
"I enjoy walking and eating healthy foods that lower your cholesterol like Cheerios."



Laura Morrongiello, *Nursing*
"Exercise of course - cardio, running or treadmill, speed walking, weight training, and eating healthy. I enjoy incorporating fruits and vegetables, low cholesterol, low fat, high protein foods into my diet. I'm also big on taking vitamins."

Watch New Episodes of RUMC Vital Signs

▶ EPISODE 21: UNLOCKING THE KEYS TO A WOMAN'S HEALTHY HEART

In this episode, RUMC's Chief of Women's Cardiovascular Health, Fiona Shehaj, MD, discusses how heart disease and even heart attacks affect women different from men while also sharing advice on how women can maintain good heart health throughout their life.



To watch this episode and others covering a range of health-related topics, scan the QR code.



Airing on Community Media of Staten Island Channel 34 and available at www.RUMCSI.org, each episode of RUMC Vital Signs covers the latest trends in medicine and provides in-depth information on the services provided at Richmond University Medical Center.



Catch Up on the Latest Episodes of RUMC Connections Podcast

▶ SEASON 3, EPISODE 1: CUTTING EDGE CANCER TREATMENTS AT RUMC

In this episode, host Meredith Gaskins, is joined by Calvin Han, MD, Associate Chief of Hematology-Oncology, to discuss cutting-edge cancer treatments at RUMC and the role of immunotherapy and targeted therapies.



To listen to these episodes and others covering a range of health-related topics, scan the QR code.



rumcsi.org/RUMCCpodcast

RUMC is using the Advanced Lipid Panel for Early Detection of Cardiovascular Disease



Marisa A. Semioli, FNP-BC, FNP-C, CEN

In an effort to help determine why so many cardiovascular, endocrine, and autoimmune diseases are on the rise, especially among younger people, Richmond University Medical Center has been incorporating the powerful Advanced Lipid Panel along with standard inflammation and insulin resistance testing. “This panel allows us to go beyond the standard screening and delve in deeper and earlier to better assess our patients’ risk of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) and hopefully prevent it or else slow its progression,” Family Nurse Practitioner Marisa A. Semioli, FNP-BC, FNP-C, CEN, said.

According to Semioli, the Advanced Lipid Panel (ALP) goes beyond the standard lipid panel or A1C tests that people may routinely receive as part of a physical exam to more thoroughly investigate the composition of inflammatory, cholesterol, and glucose markers.

“The Advanced Lipid Panel breaks down the particles in such an in-depth manner that it can point out genetic and molecular components that put people at higher risk for cardiovascular, endocrine, and autoimmune diseases than others,” she said. “It helps screen our patients better than ever before, focuses on preventing these conditions, especially among those with a strong familial component, and delivers results that can add an important new level of clarity and accuracy to a patient’s diagnosis and resultant treatment plan.”

“For example, the Advanced Lipid Panel’s

monitoring of “hs-CRP” measures the amount of c-reactive protein (CRP) in the blood – a high level of which reflects the presence of inflammation in the body and can correlate to a higher risk of cardiovascular disease than someone with normal levels,” said Semioli, who added that the panel’s measure of ‘Lp-PLA2’ can also be used to identify active inflammation within the vessels that contributes to plaque formation. Among other measures tracked by the ALP, elevated levels of ‘Lipoprotein A’ can reflect an increased risk of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease, while higher levels of ‘ApoA1,’ which reflects the level of ‘good’ cholesterol (HDL) in the blood, can indicate a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease.

At the same time, “ApoB closely measures the level of ‘bad’ cholesterol (LDL) in the body and elevated levels of ApoB can suggest an increased risk of cardiovascular disease -- even if the

providers order when screening for diabetes, insulin resistance can go undetected for up to 10-15 years before it’s reflected in hemoglobin A1C levels. However, there are a number of in-depth insulin resistance panels offered by leading diagnostic labs that will hopefully soon become the gold-standard tests for identifying insulin resistance and potentially preventing or slowing the progression of diabetes.”

For doctors and patients alike, “having access to more in-depth bloodwork enables us to develop a more accurate and personalized treatment plan as opposed to a more standard or ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to treating cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, inflammation, or insulin resistance,” Semioli said. “There’s more to the story than the standard guidelines we follow and these advanced-level blood tests provide new clarity and insight into each patient’s unique body chemistry, enabling



patient’s overall LDL cholesterol level is in the normal range,” Semioli said, adding that the size and shape of LDL particles measured by the Advanced Lipid Panel is also revealing. Specifically, “the presence of large numbers of small, dense LDL particles (as opposed to large, buoyant ones) may reflect underlying insulin resistance and a higher risk of developing diabetes.”

“Insulin resistance – which is associated with cardiovascular disease, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, chronic kidney disease, and polycystic ovary syndrome and is even linked to dementia, cancer, and obesity – can be gradual and difficult to recognize,” Semioli said. “In fact, while ‘hemoglobin A1C’ is the main test most

us to provide more individualized treatment and help prevent these diseases. We’re at battle,” she said, “but we now have more tools to screen earlier and battle back instead of succumbing to these diseases.”

Semioli encourages people to have their primary doctor or the Richmond University Medical Center team order the Advanced Lipid Panel and to see a cardiologist or endocrinologist as necessary based on the results of the ALP. “This test will help us prevent disease or accurately manage people’s therapy if they already have this disease,” Semioli said, “and it can potentially help prevent or reverse this disease process among others in their family as well.”

A Guide to Empowering Your Heart for a Healthier Future



Fiona Shehaj, MD, Chief of Women's Cardiovascular Health

Heart disease is the leading cause of death nationally. High blood pressure and cholesterol are two of the primary causes of heart disease. Nearly 30% of Staten Island adults have high blood pressure and/or high cholesterol, a slightly lower proportion than the nation overall. Despite this finding, Staten Island has historically had a higher rate of death due to heart disease.

Below, Fiona Shehaj, MD, chief of Women's Cardiovascular Health, shares 10 empowering facts that will keep you in the know, from symptoms of heart disease and treatments for the condition, to ways of preventing its development in the first place:

1. Heart Disease Defined: "Heart disease is an umbrella term encompassing many forms of the condition, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), carotid artery disease, cardiovascular disease, stroke and more," Dr. Shehaj said.

2. Prevalence: "Heart disease remains the No. 1 killer in the U.S. and accounts for nearly one million deaths a year, more than the top three cancers combined," said Dr. Shehaj, who noted that coronary artery disease (blockages to the arteries of the heart) is the most prevalent form. "According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 16 million Americans over age 20 have coronary artery disease," she confirmed. "In that respect, another 'Scary Big C' that people should focus on, in addition to 'cancer,' should be coronary artery and cardiovascular

disease, which don't receive the attention they deserve."

3. Symptoms: According to Dr. Shehaj, men and women can experience heart disease and/or a heart attack differently. "In men, symptoms include pain in the center of the chest that can radiate to the left jaw or left arm," she said. "Women may also experience chest pain, but their symptoms can also be more vague and subtle, such as shortness of breath, anxiety/anxiousness, headache, nausea, fatigue or just a sense of not feeling right. If you find that any of these symptoms are prolonged and unremitting, you should definitely bring them to a physician's attention."

4. Risk Factors: Risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol as well as environmental factors such as smoking, low socioeconomic status, and high stress at home or on the job. "As physicians, we try to mitigate these factors through medication and lifestyle choices," Dr. Shehaj explained. In terms of the average profile, "anyone can be affected by heart disease, but diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol are three top risk factors; others include obesity, physical inactivity/sedentary behavior and a family history of the disease." Dr. Shehaj noted that in women, early menopause, polycystic ovary syndrome and high blood pressure during pregnancy are also factors that can increase the risk of heart disease.

5. Medications for Heart Disease: "There are a wide variety of medications available to treat the many different forms of heart disease, from drugs that promote blood thinning or heart rate regulation to oral and injectable medications that control cholesterol, and many more," Dr. Shehaj said. "Certain medications are better suited to different patients than others based on their side effects, the patient's preferences, and their lifestyle behaviors and ability to be compliant."

6. A New Era in Medication: "The field of cardiology is moving more toward 'biologic' forms of medication, which integrate into our own physiology and send the body signals to curtail negative physiologic responses, such as the

production of cholesterol in high amounts, for example," Dr. Shehaj shared. "This new direction in medicine in general has been especially applicable to treating cardiovascular disease."

7. A Healthy Diet: For improved heart health, Dr. Shehaj encourages people to minimize consumption of processed items like cold cuts and foods that are heavy in preservatives that extend shelf life. "People should consume a colorful collection of fruits and vegetables, even frozen varieties, as well as whole grains and nuts, and reduce their intake of red meat, which is high in cholesterol and fat," she said. "And while we do need carbohydrates in our diet, small quantities are better because carbs break down into sugar, which turns to fat in the body and can trigger negative outcomes."

8. Keep Moving: With the American Heart Association recommending at least 150 minutes of movement a week, "we encourage patients to feel free to do whatever they want, whether it's brisk walking, biking, jogging, swimming, or even just walking around the house — anything that keeps the body and heart moving," Dr. Shehaj said. "Any form of movement is good movement, even if it's just for five minutes in between meetings."

9. The Power of Prevention: "Every therapy and treatment plan should involve measures to prevent heart disease — this includes testing for risk factors and discussing medical compliance and factors in a patient's lifestyle that could impede their progress," Dr. Shehaj said. "It's not just about taking medication to treat symptoms, but about embracing lifestyle changes that can help prevent heart disease in the first place."

10. Monitor Your Heart Health: Dr. Shehaj encourages regular check-ups with a primary care doctor at least twice a year. "People often don't see a doctor because they think they feel fine, but almost all risk factors for heart disease are silent until they cause problems — and by that time, the condition can have progressed and become a bigger issue," she said. "We want people to feel empowered by making lifestyle changes that help prevent major occurrences and morbidity consequences. The preventative zone is the sweet spot to start acting."

February Observances

Please join us in acknowledging the following health-related observances for the month of February :

Month-Long:

American Heart Month
Cholangiocarcinoma Awareness Month
International Prenatal Infection Prevention Month
Low Vision Awareness Month
Marfan Syndrome Awareness Month
National Cancer Prevention Month
National Children's Dental Health Month
National Self-Check Month
Raynaud's Awareness Month
Teen Dating Violence Prevention Month

Week-Long:

February 1 to 7: African Heritage and Health Week
February 3 to 9: Children's Mental Health Awareness Week
February 3 to 9: Tinnitus Awareness Week
February 7 to 14: Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week
February 9 to 15: Heart Failure Awareness Week
February 9 to 15: National Cardiac Rehabilitation Week
February 9 to 15: Sepsis Survivor Week
February 14 to 21: National Condom Week
February 24 to March 2: National Eating Disorders Awareness Week

Recognition Days:

February 1: World Aspergillosis Day
February 2: Rheumatoid Awareness Day
February 4: World Cancer Day
February 6: Time to Talk Day
February 7: Give Kids a Smile Day
February 7: Go Red For Women
February 7: National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
February 10: International Epilepsy Day
February 14: National Donor Day
February 14: National Impotence Day
February 21: National Caregivers Day
February 22: National Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day
February 22: Recreational Sports & Fitness Day
February 27: National Protein Day
February 28: International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day
February 28: Rare Disease Day

New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Shajani Alalasundram — *RN*
Dominic Asamoah — *Director, Patient Access*
Joanne Asparro — *Program Manager*
Haley Bragoodakis-Ferri — *RN Extern*
Michelle Cheung — *RN Extern*
Nawalge Cooray — *EEG Tech*
Jessica Cumberbatch — *Nursing Assistant*
Mecca Fraser — *Case Aide*
Bridgit Gardner — *LMHC*
Jaimie Grangio — *Social Worker*
Luisa Guevara — *Nursing Assistant*
Ebony Harris — *Nursing Assistant*
Marisela Hernandez-Balderas — *RN Extern*
Samuel Herrera — *Security Office*
Raihanah Ibrahim — *RN Extern*
Anthony Incorvaia — *Case Aide*
Liana Lannicelli — *RN Extern*

Heather Martone-Tarantino — *FNP*
Vincent Mattera — *Unit Assistant*
Gissella Montes — *Nursing Assistant*
Mahmoud Moustafa — *RN*
Samuel Oppong — *Respiratory Therapist*
Joseph Othman — *RN Extern*
Ann Marie Parisi — *Social Worker*
Dean Pejcinovic — *Security Office*
Aidan Sawczyk — *RN Extern*
Anastasia Shapovalova — *RN Extern*
Ecatherina Sili — *Medical Assistant*
John Sokoll — *RN Extern*
Yessica Urbina — *Medical Assistant*
Takeria Vinson — *RN Extern*
Annesomone Younan — *Ultra Sound Tech*



RICHMOND UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

5K RUN OR WALK

**SATURDAY,
APRIL 12, 2025**

In Memory of Arnold Obey

SILVER LAKE PARK

915 VICTORY BLVD, STATEN ISLAND, NY 10301

REGISTRATION AT 8AM

KIDS DASH STARTS AT 9AM • 5K RUN STARTS AT 9:30AM

5K WALK STARTS AT 9:45AM

Trophies will be awarded to the top 3 male and top 3 female winners
Certificates will be presented to the top 3 male and top 3 female winners in each age category

For more information, visit www.rumcsi.org/5K

Race shirts will not be guaranteed on the day of the race.

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Richmond University
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