

## Support Group Offers Aphasia Patients Comfort and Camaraderie

They come from all walks of life – firefighter, author, bus driver and homemaker – but share the challenges of living with aphasia, a language disorder that affects the ability to communicate effectively.

For one hour each Friday afternoon, 10 aphasia patients find comfort and camaraderie in a support group led by speech-language pathologists at the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center at Richmond University Medical Center. Joined by their caregivers, they discuss current events, participate in guided activities and share milestones at their own pace and without judgment.

Caused by damage to the brain areas responsible for language processing, aphasia makes conversation and everyday tasks difficult and even embarrassing. The disorder can be the result of a stroke, brain injury or progressive neurological disease such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's, impacting the ability to speak, listen, read and write. In the United States, more than 2 million people have aphasia, and about 180,000 people are diagnosed with it each year. One third of all strokes result in aphasia.

"I've become more social," group member Dominick Sileo, 83, shared. "Before, I was isolating because I couldn't get my words out. The therapists are wonderful – they teach me tools to improve my speech and make me feel more secure. They are angels!"

"We love coming to the aphasia group," added Joan Haber, whose husband, Robert, participates. "It's a caring and accepting group of patients and caregivers. We've seen improvement in all areas."

At a recent session, speech-language pathologist Danielle Bove read a quote by baseball great Babe Ruth to the group: "Never let the fear of striking out get in your way." Bove and her colleagues use a quote of the day, submitted by patients, to stimulate conversation and rebuild language.

"He was No. 3!" Dominick Sileo exclaimed, referring to the number Babe Ruth wore for the Yankees.

Formed in April 2024 by Kristine Delgado, MA, CCC-SLP, administrative director of rehabilitation, the aphasia treatment group is the only one of its kind on Staten Island. Members also undergo individual speech therapy at the center. Members also socialize outside the group and keep in touch in between sessions.

"Gathering with other people who have similar issues helps them feel like they are not alone," said Bove. "There are no stigmas here. They feel comfortable with each other."

To learn more about the group and RUMC's aphasia services, call 718-818-2245.

-written by Claire Regan



*Dominick Sileo enjoys socializing with the aphasia support group at RUMC, the only one of its kind on Staten Island.*



*Speech pathologists lead a meeting of the group in the RUMC Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center*

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



This month, I wanted to share a recent experience that personified our “RUMC Family,” a term I say over and over. Every once and a while, something occurs that really drives this point home: when our “RUMC Family” comes together it is something very special and powerful.

On the morning of March 11, many of our departments participated in a mass casualty exercise. As a Level I Adult and Level II Pediatric Trauma

Center, we care for all critical and emergency situations and must at all times be ready to respond in moment’s notice, no matter the situation. The exercise showed our strengths and revealed areas for improvement, exactly what an exercise like this was intended to do. My compliments to our Safety Officer/Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Trientina Campbell, Emergency Department leadership, and all involved for organizing and running the exercise, which was no easy task. The drill concluded around noon.

That evening, fiction became reality when a van crashed into a laundromat not far from our hospital, injuring seven people. This number of patients coming at the same time triggered our mass casualty incident response protocols. Within minutes, the injured began to arrive by ambulance and our Emergency Department team sprang into action, doing what they do best. Patients were quickly triaged, courses of care implemented based on each person’s condition and all support services, from our surgical team to public relations, were engaged and coordinating with each other. Within an hour, all patients had been treated, moved to different units for additional care, and our Emergency

Department returned to a sense of normalcy, for an Emergency Department that is. Fortunately, none of the injuries were life threatening and many were released later that evening.

Being at one of our nurse stations throughout most of this response, it was incredible to watch our medical professionals in action, and at the same time, see the nearly seamless coordination between support staff and non-patient facing departments, all working together to help seven people in need. It reinforced why we do what we do, why so many of our team chose the professions they did and put their skills to use for the greater good of our community. I saw and heard members of our RUMC Family interacting with each other, knowing each other’s names, faces, and roles without hesitation in what was a very hectic situation. That is the definition of teamwork, which is why we truly are a RUMC Family.

I want to thank everyone involved in this response, from our EMS crews in the field to the Security and Environmental Services staff and everyone in-between. Many of those helped that night will never know your names, what you did or how you helped them. But they are no doubt grateful that you were there and rewarded the trust they placed in us to care for them. Thank you for what you did that night; what you do every day; and please know how much I appreciate the opportunity to work beside each of you.

**Remember the Power of One — You Make A Difference!**

Sincerely,

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

## Celebrating Excellence in Residency and Fellowship Program Honoree

Each month, one or more residents and/or fellows are selected for their exemplary service, and for embodying RUMC’s commitment to fostering a collaborative culture that enhances patient care and professional excellence. Honorees are nominated by their colleagues and selected by the Office of Graduate Medical Education’s Wellness Council.

**This month’s honoree is Jeffrey A. Prempeh, MD, Department of Psychiatry.** Dr. Prempeh is from Kumasi, Ghana, and graduated from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology



## Employee of the Month

Congratulations to our employee of the month:  
**Jennifer Dominguez**  
CME Coordinator, Department of Medicine



# RUMC's Chief Medical Officer Honored by Medical Societies

On March 26, the Richmond County Medical Society celebrated Doctor's Day with the Medical Society of the County of Kings and the Academy of Medicine of Kings (Brooklyn). One of this year's honorees was Richmond University Medical Center's Chief Medical Officer, Philip Otterbeck, MD. Dr. Otterbeck is also Chair of RUMC's Department of Medicine and Chief of Endocrinology.



*Dr. Philip Otterbeck with Dr. Ana Mendez, President of the Richmond County Medical Society, RUMC Trustee, and Chief of Ambulatory Pediatrics.*

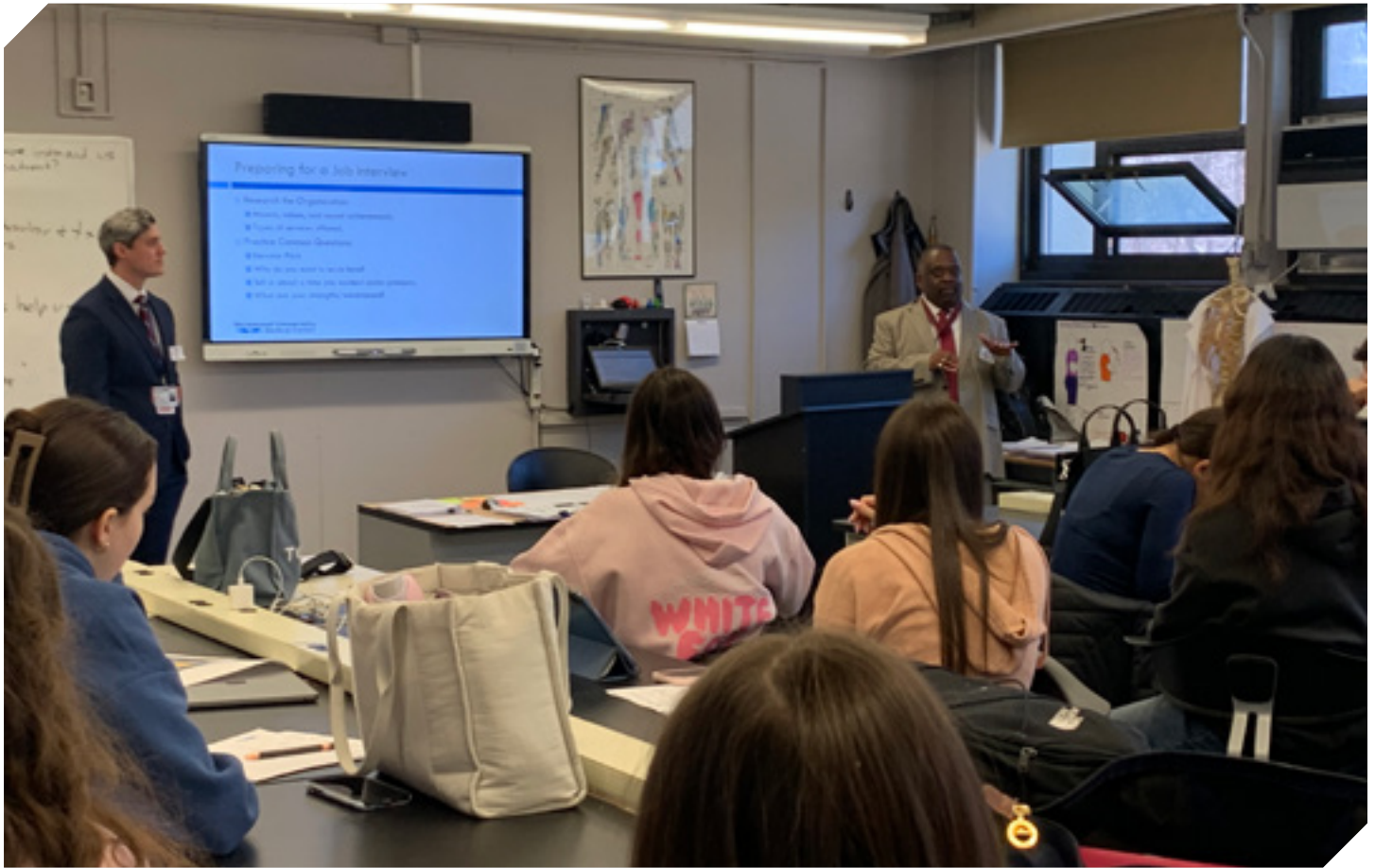
## RUMC Celebrates National Doctors' Day 2025

National Doctors' Day, observed annually on March 30, is a day to recognize and appreciate the dedication, skill, and commitment of physicians in providing healthcare. To celebrate its many doctors, RUMC held a celebration lunch on Friday, March 28.

The first Doctors' Day observance was held on March 30, 1933, in Winder, Georgia, and was conceived by Eudora Brown Almond, the wife of Dr. Charles B. Almond. The date of March 30 is also significant as it marks the anniversary of the first administration of anesthesia by Dr. Crawford W. Long in Jefferson, Georgia in 1842.



## New Medical Science Program Helps High School Students Explore Careers in Healthcare



*HR coordinator Romeo Smith discusses RUMC's Medical Science Program with students from the medical technology program at Tottenville High School.*

Richmond University Medical Center recently introduced its new Medical Science Program to the Staten Island community. The program, geared towards high school juniors and seniors, provides the opportunity to gain hands on learning experience at the hospital. Students will be able to interact with and learn alongside hospital staff while exploring future careers in the medical field. Among the departments students will rotate through include nursing, radiology, respiratory therapy, laboratory services and physical therapy, to name a few.

“We are delighted to offer this exciting program that will demonstrate the nexus between science and the service professions, which are critical for the people in our community,” RUMC’s Chief Medical Officer, Philip Otterbeck, MD, said. “Ultimately the students’ school curricula supported by experiential

learning on the hospital campus can serve as the basis for the students to see the very important, varied, and consequential work we do in a local hospital system and ignite in students a passion for helping others through careers in healthcare.”

Each session will last 6 weeks, with students coming to the hospital one day a week for two hours. On-line registration is now open. In addition to completing the on-line application, students must also pass a physical examination by their primary care doctor before being accepted into the program. The program is open to seniors or juniors enrolled in any Staten Island high school, public or private.

“Our medical science program provides a great opportunity for high school students to be able to explore the field

of healthcare right in their own community,” RUMC’s President and Chief Executive Officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. “High school is the time where students begin to think about their future careers and preparing for college, vocational, technology, or trade schools. By participating in this program, students will come out of the program with a better understanding of what career opportunities they want to pursue further.”

For more information about RUMC’s Medical Science Program and to submit an application, please go to RUMC’s website at [rumcsi.org/patients-visitors/afterschool-medical-science-program/](http://rumcsi.org/patients-visitors/afterschool-medical-science-program/) or you can reach out to either John Bruno at [jbruno@rumcsi.org](mailto:jbruno@rumcsi.org) or 718-818-2456 or Romeo Smith at [RoSmith@rumcsi.org](mailto:RoSmith@rumcsi.org) or 718-818-2445.



# Department of Behavioral Health Announces New AVP



The Department of Behavioral Health recently welcomed Dr. Prajakta (Praj) Vagal as Assistant Vice President of Behavioral Health.

Dr. Vagal is a distinguished healthcare leader and physician with over 20 years of experience transforming care delivery to enhance patient engagement, improve outcomes, and drive operational excellence. She combines clinical expertise with strategic leadership to implement innovative, value-based solutions that elevate quality across multiple systems.

Before joining RUMC, Dr. Vagal served as Senior Director of Behavioral Health Transformation at New York City

Health + Hospitals, where she led systemwide initiatives integrating primary care into behavioral health services, expanding comprehensive care management/care coordination services, and optimizing quality improvement programs aligned with value-based reimbursement models.

Dr. Vagal holds a Master of Public Administration in Health Policy and Management from New York University and a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) from Grant Medical College, Mumbai, India.

## Watch New Episodes of RUMC Vital Signs

### ▶ EPISODE 22: DISCUSSING BREAST CANCER AND NEW TECHNOLOGY CALLED MAGSEED

Board certified radiologist and Chief of Breast Radiology, Dara Fedele, MD, discusses shifting breast cancer trends on Staten Island and when breast cancer is detected, how an innovative technology, called Magseed, is leading to greater surgical precision and better comfort and convenience for patients.



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](http://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 2: BREAKING BARRIERS IN WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH

In this episode, board certified cardiologist Fiona Shehaj, MD, delves into why the healthcare system has historically overlooked women's cardiovascular health, the importance of gender-specific research, and the future of women's heart health.



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



[rumcsi.org/RUMCCpodcast](http://rumcsi.org/RUMCCpodcast)

## RUMC Auxiliary Pocketbook Bingo for a Good Cause

On March 30, over 250 people attended the RUMC Auxiliary's annual pocketbook bingo fundraiser. Proceeds from the event will support the Auxiliary's grant program. Departments at RUMC can make requests to receive support from the program to support their services.



### New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Victor Brown — *Clergy*

Joella Cardero — *Echo Cardiographer*

Arlette Gammal — *Payroll Manager*

Tiffany Gonzalez — *Receptionist*

Shaleisha Heath — *Social Worker*

Michael Howe — *Security Guard*

Adelanke John Mabogunje — *Nursing Assistant*

Kollurage Karunaratne — *Guest Representative*

Marietta Laurella — *Executive Assistant*

Marina Lobato — *Medical Assistant*

Jillian Morreall — *Registrar*

Anthony Porto — *X-Ray Tech*

Olga Pia Pozo — *LMHC*

Anna Samojlik-Dillon — *Accounts Payable  
Supervisor*

Christina Testa — *RN*

Jorge Valdez — *Respiratory Therapist*



# This month's question: What was your favorite spring break vacation and why?



**Denise Danton Nizzare**, *NCPRSS, CPRS, Peer Advocate Program Supervisor, Emergency Department*

"Costa Rica for a yoga retreat, I'm a yoga instructor. We did zip lining, a three hour hike up to see a beautiful waterfall, we took mud baths and went in clay pit ponds. It was beautiful and we go every year!"



**Dave Briscoe, EMT-B**, *Trauma Injury Prevention Coordinator*

"My favorite spring break trip was to Jamaica. I visited and re-connected with family, went to the beach and visited the Bob Marley museum."



**Amanda Brooks, RN**, *Manager, Pediatric Trauma*

"Going to all of the pool parties in Las Vegas. This was when the Kardashians were big and I went to their store at MGM Grand, too."



**Denise Thompson**, *Food Service Worker, Dietary*

"Spring break in Aruba for my daughter's 16th birthday. We loved exploring the island, enjoying the beach and pools. We keep going back to Aruba because we love it so much."



**Charles Rand**, *Guest Representative, Food Services*

"Dubrovnik, Croatia was amazing and probably one of my favorite trips. I'm a huge Game of Thrones fan, so it was the best place to go. I explored all over and went to a lot of museums."



**Ardiana Muratovic**, *Building Service Worker, Housekeeping*

"I loved going to Fort Lauderdale with my kids. We really enjoyed our time on the beach and in the pool!"

## April Observances

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

### Month-Long:

Alcohol Awareness Month  
Distracted Driving Awareness Month  
Global Child Nutrition Month  
Irritable Bowel Syndrome Awareness Month  
Medicaid Awareness Month  
National Autism Acceptance Month  
National Cancer Control Month  
National Child Abuse Prevention Month  
National Donate Life Month  
National Facial Protection Month  
National Foot Health Awareness Month  
National Interprofessional Healthcare Month  
National Minority Health Month  
National Primary Immunodeficiency Awareness Month  
National Sarcoidosis Awareness Month  
National Stress Awareness Month  
Occupational Therapy Month  
Oral Cancer Awareness Month  
Parkinson's Awareness Month  
Rosacea Awareness Month  
Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

Sexually Transmitted Infections Awareness Month  
Sjögren's Awareness Month  
Sports Eye Safety Month  
Testicular Cancer Awareness Month  
Women's Eye Health and Safety Month

### Week-Long:

April 7 to 13: National Public Health Week  
April 11 to 17: Black Maternal Health Week  
April 16 to 22: Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week  
April 20 to 26: National Infertility Awareness Week  
April 21 to 25: Every Kid Healthy Week  
April 21 to 28: National Infant Immunization Week  
April 24 to 30: World Immunization Week  
April 28 to May 2: National Youth Violence Prevention Week  
April 28 to May 2: Patient Experience Week  
April 28 to May 4: Air Quality Awareness Week

### Recognition Days:

April 1: SAAM Day of Action  
April 1: Take Down Tobacco Day  
April 2: World Autism Awareness Day  
April 6: Bohring-Opitz Syndrome Awareness Day  
April 7: World Health Day  
April 10: National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day  
April 11: World Parkinson's Day  
April 14: World Chagas Disease Day  
April 16: National Healthcare Decisions Day  
April 17: World Hemophilia Day  
April 19: Congenital Diaphragmatic Hernia Action Day  
April 25: National DNA Day  
April 25: World Malaria Day  
April 28: World Day for Safety and Health at Work

Richmond University  
Medical Center

2025

# Jack Sipp

Golf • Tennis • Bocce

Outing to Benefit Richmond University Medical Center  
Sponsored by Dina & Frank Oswald

**May 19, 2025**

Richmond County Country Club



Visit [www.rumcsi.org/golf](http://www.rumcsi.org/golf) to register

