

RUMC's New President of the Medical Staff



Simon Kokkinakis, MD
Obstetrics & Gynecology

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*Dr. Simon Kokkinakis takes the reins of a new role: representing RUMC's medical staff. **Story on Page 3.***



From the President John C. Evanko, MD, MBA, FACOG

As we enter the final stretch of summer, August often brings a unique mix of energy and anticipation. Across our hospital, our teams remain hard at work caring for patients, supporting families,

training future healthcare professionals, and preparing for the opportunities that lie ahead.

One of the things I have quickly come to appreciate since becoming President is that progress at RUMC is not measured solely by new buildings, programs, or technology. It is measured by people. It is reflected in the nurse who takes an extra moment to comfort a patient, the environmental services employee who helps create a safe and welcoming environment, the physician who mentors a resident, the therapist who encourages a patient through recovery, and the countless team members whose efforts often happen behind the scenes.

Every day, those individual acts add up to something remarkable.

Over the past several months, I have had the opportunity to meet team members from nearly every area of the organization. Whether on patient care units, in outpatient offices, throughout our support departments, or during community events, I have been impressed by the passion people bring to their work. The sense of purpose that exists throughout this institution is something special, and it is one of the reasons RUMC has remained such an important part of Staten Island for more than a century.

As we look ahead, we will continue investing in our facilities, strengthening physician recruitment, advancing quality initiatives, and creating new opportunities for growth. Most importantly, we will continue focusing on what matters most: our patients and their families.

Our mission, Partnering with Patients and Families for Better Health, serves as a reminder that healthcare is ultimately about people. Every interaction, every clinical decision, every act of kindness contributes to the trust that our community places in us.

Thank you for all that you do each day to make that trust possible. Your dedication, resilience, and compassion are the foundation of this organization.

I hope you and your families continue to enjoy the remainder of the summer, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Dr. John C. Evanko
President

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
Abdul Aziz Habib Ullah, MD.**

Dr. Habib Ullah is a PGY 3 in the Department of Medicine. He earned his medical degree from the RAK College of Medical Sciences in the United Arab Emirates. His hometown is Abu Dhabi, UAE.



Northfield Bank Foundation Gives Back to RUMC



On July 28, Northfield Bank Foundation Executive Director Diane Senerchia presented the hospital with a check for \$39,719.52 to benefit our Wayne Zenna Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. This donation was made possible through proceeds from the Northfield Bank Foundation's Charity Golf Classic, held in May. Accepting the donation on behalf of RUMC were President Dr. John C. Evanko; Chair of the Board of Trustees Timothy C. Harrison; and Robert Urs, Chair of the RUMC Foundation Board of Directors and a member of the Board of Trustees.

Richmond University Medical Center Welcomes New Medical Staff President



*New President of the Medical Staff,
Dr. Simon Kokkinakis.*

By Daria Magill

Richmond University Medical Center has announced the appointment of Dr. Simon Kokkinakis as President of the Medical Staff. His two-year term began on July 1, 2026.

In his new role, Dr. Kokkinakis will work closely with RUMC's medical staff serving as its voice in matters of hospital policy and decision making. He will also serve as liaison between the medical staff, hospital executive administration, and the Board of Trustees to ensure the collective ideas and recommendations of the over 400 medical staff members at RUMC are represented.

"I am eager to represent the medical staff at RUMC, I want to be their biggest advocate ensuring their voices are heard," Dr. Kokkinakis said. "When change occurs, it is important to have a positive outlook and keep morale high. A supported team delivers better care"

Dr. Kokkinakis is board certified in obstetrics and gynecology and is a Fellow of both the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the American College of Surgeons. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from New York University, and graduated from Ross University School of Medicine, completing his internship and residency training in obstetrics and gynecology at SUNY Buffalo/Women and Children's Hospital of Buffalo, where he also served as Administrative Chief Resident. He obtained his Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Dr. Kokkinakis has been a full-time attending physician in RUMC's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology since 2006.

"Simon is a highly respected physician, educator, and leader who has devoted nearly two decades to serving Richmond University Medical Center and our

community," President Dr. John C. Evanko said. "He understands the challenges facing physicians today and has always been a strong advocate for collaboration, professionalism, and excellence in patient care. I am confident he will be an outstanding president for our medical staff, and I look forward to working alongside him as we continue to strengthen our organization and serve the people of Staten Island."

Dr. Kokkinakis assumes the title of President of the Medical Staff previously held by Dr. Francesco Rotatori, chief of RUMC's Cardiovascular Department, a role Rotatori held for the past three years.

"Leaving the role of President of the Medical Staff is bittersweet. During my tenure, my main objective and focus was on supporting our physicians and elevating the quality of care we offer to our community." Dr. Rotatori said, "I am incredibly pleased to hand over these responsibilities to Simon, a highly respected colleague who has stood by my side for the past few years. He possesses the deep expertise needed to take over this position, and I am confident he will lead effectively through the ongoing challenges facing the healthcare industry today."

RUMC Welcomes Young Minds Exploring Careers in Medicine



Students enrolled in RUMC's summer youth programs were greeted on their first day by RUMC President Dr. John C. Evanko (front row, right) and Romeo Smith, senior recruiter, Human Resources Department (front row, left).

We are excited to welcome over 40 students from various high schools across Staten Island who have enrolled

in our summer youth programs. The students will rotate through many of our clinical departments over the

summer learning from our professionals about life in the medical field and how RUMC cares for patients and their families.

Among the high schools represented are Curtis High School; Gaynor McCown Expeditionary High School; the Michael J. Petrides School; Moore Catholic High School; New Dorp High School; Notre Dame Academy; Saint Joseph by the Sea; Staten Island Technical High School; Sant Joseph Hill Academy; Tottenville High School; Susan W. Wagner High School; and Xaverian High School.

Bringing Mental Health Care Home: RUMC Unveils Youth ACT Program and Mobile Services Vehicle



Cutting the ribbon on New York State's only Youth ACT program mobile services van.

By Cheryl Garber

On July 8, Richmond University Medical Center (RUMC) officially launched its Youth ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) program with a ribbon cutting ceremony held on the campus of Staten Island Mental Health Society, a division of RUMC since 2019.

As part of the ceremony, RUMC also unveiled the program's new Youth ACT mobile services vehicle, which will help the team meet young people and families where they are—at home, at school, and throughout the community. The Youth ACT vehicle is the only one of its kind in New York State.

A comprehensive community-based behavioral health program, Youth ACT is designed to support young people ages 10 to 24 who are living with mental health challenges and may be at risk of hospitalization, out-of-home placement, or transitioning back home after treatment. Provided through Staten Island Mental Health Society, the program brings care directly into the community through a multidisciplinary team providing therapy, psychiatric evaluations, medication management, peer support, crisis intervention, and more.

"The children and adolescents that this program serves have often been through more than most of us can imagine," said Dr. Jonathan Zipkin, executive vice president and chief operating officer at RUMC. "Many have experienced repeated psychiatric hospitalizations. Others have struggled to engage with traditional outpatient care or are returning home after treatment here in our inpatient setting. For many families, the hardest part isn't wanting help - it's being able to access it consistently."

Joining staff and leadership at the ceremony were several community leaders, clergy, and partners, including New York State Assembly Member Sam Pirozzolo, and Adrienne Abbate, executive director of Staten Island Partnership for Community Wellness (SIPCW).

RUMC was selected as one of only ten organizations across New York State to receive full funding from the New York State Office of Mental Health to develop the Youth ACT program.

Miriam Prat-Mallilo, director of OMH Child and Adolescent Outpatient Mental Health Services at RUMC said "for Staten Island families, the expansion means greater access to intensive mental health services delivered where they are needed most. Helping vulnerable youth stay connected to their schools, families and communities while receiving treatment."



The Youth ACT program team.

Richmond University Medical Center Earns Top National Stroke Awards, Continues Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center Certification



Dr. Allan Perel, Chief of Neurology

By Meredith Gaskins

Richmond University Medical Center (RUMC) has once again received the American Heart Association's Get With The Guidelines - Stroke Gold Plus quality achievement award, recognizing its continued commitment to ensuring stroke patients receive the most appropriate, research-based care aimed at improving outcomes, saving lives, and reducing long-term disability.

"These certifications and recognitions are wonderful," Dr. Allan Perel, chief of neurology, said. "It validates the tremendous work and preparation it takes to achieve these distinctions. We at RUMC are proud of the high quality of care given to people and their families who have a stroke. Treatment of stroke is an extremely high priority at RUMC since stroke is the number one cause of significant disability in the United States."

In addition to the Gold Plus designation, RUMC also earned the American Heart Association's Target: Stroke Honor Roll Elite and Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll awards. These distinctions highlight the hospital's ability to deliver rapid, evidence-based stroke treatment and provide specialized care for patients with comorbid conditions such as diabetes.

RUMC also continues to maintain its designation as an Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center, the second-highest designation a facility can obtain,

reflecting its comprehensive capabilities in stroke diagnosis, treatment, and coordinated patient care.

"These recognitions reflect the dedication, expertise, and collaboration of our entire stroke team," Dr. Perel, continued. "Providing timely, high-quality stroke care requires constant focus and coordination. We are proud to continue delivering the level of care our patients and community depend on."



Stroke remains a leading cause of death and disability in the United States. It occurs when a blood vessel supplying oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked or ruptures, depriving brain tissue of essential blood flow. Prompt diagnosis and rapid treatment are critical to improving survival rates, minimizing disability, and supporting recovery. RUMC treats hundreds of stroke patients each year.

The American Heart Association's Get With The Guidelines® - Stroke program helps hospitals align patient care with the latest specific evidence and national standards. Hospitals that participate in the program demonstrate consistent adherence to treatment protocols that

are proven to enhance recovery and reduce mortality.

To earn these awards, RUMC demonstrated success in delivering timely stroke care, including rapid evaluation and treatment for eligible patients. The Target: Stroke Honor Roll Elite designation specifically recognizes hospitals that significantly reduce the time from patient arrival to administration of clot-busting medication.

RUMC's receipt of the Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll award further recognizes its specialized care for stroke patients with diabetes, a condition that significantly increases stroke risk and complicates recovery.

"Managing stroke patients with underlying conditions like diabetes requires a highly coordinated, multidisciplinary approach," said Dr. Philip Otterbeck, RUMC's chief medical officer, chair of medicine and chief of endocrinology. "This recognition highlights the comprehensive care we provide to ensure patients receive the best possible outcomes."

This marks the 8th consecutive year that RUMC has earned Gold Plus status. It is also the 5th time RUMC has earned Honor Roll Elite status and the 4th time the hospital has been named to the Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll in the past 8 years.

"Our stroke program continues to be recognized at the highest level year after year," said RUMC President Dr. John C. Evanko. "These awards underscore our unwavering commitment to clinical excellence and to providing our patients with the most advanced, evidence-based stroke care available. From the moment a patient arrives, through treatment and recovery, our team is focused on delivering outstanding care every step of the way."

Why Stroke Rates are Climbing Among Millennials

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 800,000 Americans suffer a stroke annually and more than 130,000 of these cases prove fatal. But while a majority of strokes affect individuals age 65 and older, recent data showing an alarming rise in stroke cases among younger adults is challenging the long-standing belief that strokes are primarily associated with older people.

The result of a blockage or rupture to a blood vessel that prevents blood and oxygen from getting to the brain and causes brain cells to die, stroke stands as the fifth leading cause of death and a major cause of neurological disability in the United States. But while the risk of stroke does increase with age, the CDC identified a nearly 15% increase in stroke cases among individuals ages 18 to 44 between 2020 and 2022.

“The older people are, the narrower and less flexible their arteries and blood vessels can become and the more likely they are to suffer a stroke, especially if they have underlying conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes,” said Dr. Allan Perel, chief of the Department of Neurology.

“Over the years, the medical community has done a good job of reducing the stroke rate in older adults through initiatives like smoking cessation programs and better management of blood pressure and diabetes,” Dr. Perel noted. “But we’re now seeing a rise in the incidence of stroke among a group of younger adults, particularly those between 30-45 years of age, and we need to focus on reaching that demographic and reversing this concerning trend.”

Dr. Perel said that while traditional risk factors for stroke — including torn arteries, obesity, unmanaged diabetes and/or high blood pressure, sickle cell disease in African Americans, etc. — have long been known by the medical community, a clear cause behind the increase in stroke cases among younger people is less well understood. “Americans are losing weight through GLP-1 agents, cigarette use among 18- to 44-year-olds continues to decline, and statistics reveal that people with diabetes and high blood pressure are more proactive about managing these conditions than ever,” he said. “So, we don’t yet have a definitive answer as to why stroke rates are rising among younger adults.”

Experts contend that the rise in strokes among millennials corresponds to a rise in cardiovascular risks that can be caused or exacerbated by such factors as sedentary lifestyles/obesity, the use of opioids, cocaine, and other illicit drugs (which can cause high blood pressure, spasms, and blockages in arteries), the use of medication for ADHD (which has been linked to an increased risk of cardiomyopathy/heart muscle disease), the consumption of energy drinks (which can trigger atrial fibrillation/stroke in young adults), and stress.

“Other factors may also include a pandemic-era rise in COVID-related infections that caused blood to become more coagulative, as well as the fallout of chronic stress — which elevates blood pressure and causes inflammation in the body — among this demographic,” Dr. Perel said.

Dr. Perel offers the following tips for minimizing the risk of stroke, especially among young adults:

- **Get Regular Check-Ups** – “It’s important to see a doctor every year (or on an agreed-upon schedule with your doctor) to check your lungs and blood pressure, have bloodwork done, and, if necessary, perform an EKG of your heart,” said Dr. Perel, who noted that many younger adults either don’t go to doctors at all or else see them only sporadically.
- **Eat Healthy** – “Avoid fast/processed foods, sugary items, and the heavy use of salt,” advised Dr. Perel, who recommended the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet, which promotes less red meat and greater consumption of fish, Omega-3 fats, nuts, and fruits and vegetables.
- **Know Your Risk Factors** – “Those with a family history of stroke (particularly at a young age) or women who have had a miscarriage or a clot in their leg may be at greater risk of a stroke,” Dr. Perel said, “and these are important details to share with a doctor.”
- **Stay Active** – While many younger adults spend significant sedentary time watching TV, playing video games, and surfing the internet, Dr. Perel cannot overemphasize the importance of regular exercise. “Physical activity keeps blood vessels healthy, reduces weight, strengthens the heart muscle, stimulates the brain, and enhances circulation and immunity, so it’s great to engage in whatever activity you can safely do on a regular basis,” he said.
- **Make Lifestyle Improvements** – In addition to refraining from smoking (a major risk factor for stroke), Dr. Perel advises people to focus on stress reduction and work-life balance. “Blood pressure and stroke risk increase as a result of chronic stress,” he said.
- **Don’t Think You’re Invincible** – “Stroke can be debilitating at any age, and the key goal of all medicine is primary prevention,” Dr. Perel said. “We recommend that young people go to the doctor for a check-up, even if they feel well or think they have no risk factors or medical conditions. The risk of heart issues and stroke may still exist even if you feel fine, and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

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RUMC Auxiliary Hosts Annual Spring Luncheon

By Claire Regan



The Richmond University Medical Center Auxiliary hosted its spring luncheon on June 11 at LiGreci's Staaten. President Lucille Forlenza welcomed more than 75

members and guests who were joined by hospital leaders and staff members for the annual event. A variety of raffles raised money for the Auxiliary's grant

program, which makes the purchase of medical equipment possible throughout the hospital, enhancing patient care.

Welcoming New Residents with Annual Procedures Day Training

Recently, Richmond University Medical Center's Department of Medicine held its annual Procedures Day. The event welcomes the hospital's new residents and showcases common procedures the residents may be involved in.

Residents in attendance this year represented many different departments including pediatrics, podiatry, radiology, obstetrics and gynecology, and psychology. Featured among the procedures and trainings this year were performing intubations, foley catheter insertion, language training, sutures, avoiding needle sticks, diagnosing, treating and preventing sepsis, venipuncture, and inserting central arterial lines.

A teaching hospital, Richmond University Medical Center proudly has a century-old tradition of preparing the next generation of medical professionals, many of whom are residents of Staten Island.



A demonstration on how to properly insert a foley catheter.



New residents had an opportunity to practice their venipuncture technique.

New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Mohamed Abdelaziz — *LMHC*
Brandon Abizadeh — *Resident*
Feven Abriha — *Resident*
Chinaemezu Agwu — *Resident*
Mahmoud Ali — *Resident*
Denise Arnold - Fontanez —
Authorization Coord./ Billing
Bianca Arzadon — *Resident*
Rebecca Awad — *Resident*
Fazlija Azemine — *Building Service Worker*
Amir Bagheri — *Resident*
Elizabeth Balestire — *Nursing Assistant*
Slvia Bellili — *RN*
Ariana Bloise — *RN*
Maryam Busari — *RN*
Orted Cene Float — *RN*
Olivia Centoza — *License Art Therapist*
Tristan Cossaro — *Resident*
Joseph Cruz — *RN*
Vincent De Souza — *RN Coordinator*
Frezer Degefa — *Resident*
Deanna Delvento — *RN*
Jovante Dockery — *Resident*
Ajay Dulai — *Resident*
Annmarie Fernando — *Fellow*
Ryan Flaherty — *Transporter*

Enjeh Fombo — *Resident*
Chavonne Foster — *RN*
Stephanie French — *RN*
Felicia Gambino — *LMHC*
Ronald Gibson — *Resident*
Anzu Giri — *Resident*
Meredith Guastavino — *RN*
Noha Hammad — *Resident*
Adeshola Ishola — *Resident*
Edona Ismailil — *Building Service Worker*
Deoram Kajram — *Resident*
Umar Khalil — *Fellow*
Fahad Khan — *Resident*
Lisette Kiadidi — *Resident*
Jisoo Lee — *Resident*
Ethelene Linchangco — *RN*
Brandon Lokshin — *Resident*
Mejia Magaly — *RN*
Rakeb Mamo — *Resident*
Alvin Marin — *Respiratory Aide*
Fawzi Massouh — *Resident*
Michele Mathew — *Pharmacist*
Shawn Mathurine — *Food Service Worker*
Stacy-Ann McGregor — *Nursing Assistant*
Cheyenne McPhatter — *Unit Clerk*
Diana Mensah — *Resident*

Lindsay Montarello — *RN*
Nicole Mordekai — *Resident*
Meghana Muppuri — *Resident*
Helal Musa — *Respiratory Therapist*
Julian Nepola — *Resident*
Olubunmi Olojede — *Resident*
Thineskaran Parameswaran — *Resident*
Pruthvi Patel — *Resident*
Samantha Petrucci — *Resident*
Ajith Raja — *Resident*
Jason Reeves — *Building Service Worker*
Djellza Rrukiqi — *Resident*
Gabriella Salerno — *Receptionist*
Christina Salzana — *X-Ray Tech*
Musab Samarra — *Resident*
Melissa Schroeder — *RN Coordinator*
Emilio Serrano — *RN*
Cade Sixon — *Float RN*
William Slattery — *Resident*
Vanshika Talasila — *Resident*
Ian Torello — *Case Aide*
Lauren Velasquez — *Resident*
Abigail Zapinsky — *Mental Health Tech*
Alice Zeng — *OR Surgical Tech*
Arsene Mustapha Zoker — *Nursing Assistant*
Paola Zunega — *Resident*

August Observances

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

Month-Long:

Autoinflammatory Awareness Month
Children's Eye Health and Safety Awareness Month
Digestive Tract Paralysis Awareness Month
Gastroparesis Awareness Month
National Breastfeeding Month
National Eye Exam Month
National Immunization Awareness Month
National Minority Donor Awareness Month
Psoriasis Action Month
Spinal Muscular Atrophy Awareness Month
Summer Sun Safety Month

Week-Long:

August 1 to 7: World Breastfeeding Week
August 2 to 8: National Health Center Week
August 10 to 16: OSHA's Safe and Sound Week
August 17 to 21: Contact Lens Health Week
August 23 to 29: Health Unit Coordinator Recognition Week

Recognition Days:

August 1: National Minority Donor Awareness Day
August 1: World Lung Cancer Day
August 3: Cloves Syndrome Awareness Day
August 18: World Breast Cancer Research Day
August 19: World Humanitarian Day
August 23: Health Unit Coordinator Appreciation Day
August 30: National Grief Awareness Day
August 31: International Overdose Awareness Day

