Welcome Aboard!

We are very excited to have so many new, capable and skilled physicians relocate to our area and join the staff of Wilkes Regional Medical Center.

In August, John Paul Velasco, M.D., arrived to begin his practice in family medicine joining Wilkes Family Health Center. He has chosen to come to Wilkes County to be closer his parents who live in Charlotte.

Also in August, we were pleased to welcome Joseph Cipriano, D.O., general surgeon, and his wife, Sneha Cipriano, D.O., family practitioner. Dr. Joe Cipriano is joining Wilkes Regional Surgical Specialists, and Dr. Sneha Cipriano is seeing new patients at Rock Creek Family Medicine and Urgent Care.

Most recently, on Dec. 1, Jose Carrasquillo, MD, gastroenterologist, began his practice at the office of Wilkes Regional Gastroenterology located in West Park.

We are excited to have these talented physicians come to Wilkes Regional to meet the medical and surgical needs of the people of our region. Increasingly, more folks in Wilkes and surrounding counties are choosing Wilkes Regional for their care. The reason for their choice is clear — we have an outstanding team of professionals and the best physicians in the region.

J. Gene Faile
President and Chief Executive Officer
Wilkes Regional Medical Center

ER Recognition

Survey names Wilkes Regional one of the ‘Best Hospitals for Emergency Care’

Wilkes Regional Medical Center received a 2015 Women’s Choice Award as one of America’s “Best Hospitals for Emergency Care.” It is one of only two hospitals in the state to receive this honor.

This distinction places Wilkes Regional in the top 10 percent of the 3,800 emergency rooms that report data to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the award organization said.

“Hospitals are judged on eight measures that relate primarily to the time effectiveness of the emergency department, including time for diagnosis, medication and admission to the hospital, which are weighed according to the priorities of surveyed women,” the organization said. “Those earning the emergency care award fell into the top 25 percent for most or all of the eight measures."

Among the eight measures, women rate “door to diagnostic time,” or “door to doctor,” as the most important criterion when selecting an emergency room, according to the Women’s Choice Award. The least important measure, the organization mentioned, is the percentage of patients who left the emergency department before being seen.

U.S. News Names Best for 2015

Wilkes’ skilled nursing unit is rated among top in state

U.S. News and World Report has ranked the Wilkes Regional Medical Center skilled nursing unit as one of the best nursing homes in the state. It is the second year in a row Wilkes received this honor.

The magazine awarded the hospital nursing unit five out of five possible stars for overall care, health inspections, nurse staffing and quality measures for 2014 and 2015. The data originates from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). CMS oversees federal payments to nursing homes and assigns the star ratings.

Each nursing home in the country received an overall rating of one to five stars, based on ratings in three categories: state-conducted health inspections, how much time nurses spend with residents and the quality of medical care.

The health inspections rating "describes how well this home met health and safety standards for food preparation and other nursing-home activities," says the U.S. News website. The nurse staffing rating is based on the average number of hours per days of care received per resident from nurses and physical therapists. Quality measures are based on the “residents who got recommended care, such as flu vaccinations, and percentages of residents who had pain, bedsores, urinary tract infections, and other care-related problems,” the website said.

Cover photo: New physicians on staff at Wilkes Regional (left to right): Sneha Cipriano, D.O., family medicine; Joseph Cipriano, D.O., general surgery; John Paul Velasco, M.D., family medicine; and Jose Carrasquillo, M.D., gastroenterology.
Colon Cancer Screenings

One of the objectives of a GI doctor is to spot colon cancer early. This greatly increases treatment success. Here are screening guidelines:

- Regular screenings are recommended beginning at age 50 and continuing until age 75.
- People at higher risk, such as African-Americans and those with a family history of colorectal cancer, should begin screenings at a younger age and may be screened more frequently.
- A blood test, which checks for hidden blood in three consecutive stool samples, is recommended as a yearly test.
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy, which involves an examination of the rectum and part of the colon, is recommended every five years.
- A colonoscopy, which is an examination of the rectum and entire colon, should be done every 10 years.

**Gastroenterology doctors specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the esophagus, stomach, intestines, gall bladder, liver and pancreas. Also known as gastrointestinal (GI) doctors, they treat a range of conditions, including acid reflux, abdominal pain, ulcers, colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease, colon cancer, hepatitis C and gastrointestinal bleeding.**

**GERD**

Acid reflux, also known as GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease), is one of the most common GI conditions. When caught early, it is easily treated.

Treatment begins with dietary modifications and over-the-counter medications. These include H-2 receptor blockers, such as the well-known drugs Pepcid AC, Tagamet and Zantac. Proton pump inhibitors, which block acid production and allow time for damaged esophageal tissue to heal, are also used. Two of these are Prilosec OTC and Prevacid.

When left untreated, GERD can lead to a narrowing of the esophagus due to prolonged exposure to acid; or Barrett's esophagus, a precancerous condition. Treatments for Barrett's may involve the endoscopic removal of abnormal tissue. Radiofrequency ablation, a relatively new option to eradicate an abnormal growth, is also available at the hospital.

**HEPATITIS C**

A more serious illness that GI doctors confront is hepatitis C, an infectious disease that primarily affects the liver. It is caused by the hepatitis C virus. While the infection is often asymptomatic, chronic infection can lead to scarring of the liver and ultimately to cirrhosis, which is generally apparent after many years. In some cases, those with cirrhosis will go on to develop liver failure, liver cancer or other life-threatening conditions. Hepatitis C affects over 3 million people in the United States, most of whom are baby boomers.

Sometimes, GI doctors use endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP), a technique that combines the use of endoscopy and fluoroscopy to diagnose and treat certain problems. ERCP is used primarily to diagnose and treat conditions of the bile ducts and main pancreatic duct, including gallstones, inflammatory strictures (scars), leaks (from trauma and surgery) and cancer.
Know Your Numbers

Regular screenings can stave off heart disease

Heart disease is a major threat to the health of Americans. It is the leading cause of death for both men and women, causing about 1 in 4 deaths overall. It’s important to know whether you are at risk so you can take action.

People who use tobacco, have a diet high in saturated fat and cholesterol, lack regular physical activity, and drink alcohol excessively are more likely to develop heart disease.

The key to preventing cardiovascular disease and related health issues is managing your risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high total cholesterol and high blood glucose. The best way to find out your risk factors is through screening tests during regular doctor visits. Here are the key screening tests recommended:

**BLOOD PRESSURE**
Measures the pressure put on artery walls when your heart beats and between beats.
- 140/90 mm Hg or above is high.
- 120/80 to 139/89 mm Hg is prehypertension.
- Less than 120/80 mm Hg is normal.

**CHOLESTEROL**
Know the “good” (HDL), the “bad” (LDL) and the fats (triglycerides). The higher your HDL, the lower your chance of heart disease, while the more LDL and triglycerides you have, the greater your chance of heart disease.
- Total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dL.
- HDL levels at 50 mg/dL or above are ideal.
- LDL levels should be below 130 mg/dL (even lower with certain health issues).
- Triglycerides should be below 150.

**BLOOD SUGAR**
A measure of how much sugar (glucose) is in your blood. High blood sugar can signal diabetes.
- Fasting levels below 100 mg/dL are healthy.
- Fasting levels between 100 mg/dL and 125 mg/dL are considered prediabetes.
- Fasting levels of 126 mg/dL or higher typically result in a diabetes diagnosis.

**BODY MASS INDEX (BMI)**
BMI indicates whether or not a person is overweight or obese.
- Weight (in pounds) ÷ height’ (in inches) x 703 = BMI.
- 19 to 25 indicates a healthy weight.
- 26 to 30 is overweight (excluding well-muscled individuals).
- 31 or higher is considered obese.
WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE
Number of inches around your unclothed abdomen, just above the hipbone, can indicate your risk for some diseases like diabetes.

- A measurement of less than 35 inches is desirable for a woman and less than 40 inches is desirable for a man.

Make Your Move
Physical activity has been proven to help burn calories, lower your blood pressure, reduce LDL “bad” cholesterol and raise HDL “good” cholesterol. How much do you need? The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise (or a combination of moderate and vigorous activity). This might translate to 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

An exercise plan could include aerobic exercise (or “cardio”), stretching and strength training. Aerobic exercise includes running, biking and swimming. Strength training might involve weights and resistance bands.

While it’s easy to think of running on a treadmill or lifting barbells, exercise does not have to be restricted to the gym. A brisk walk outside is great exercise for the body, and it is relaxing for the mind, too. Other good outdoor activities include going on a hike; taking a nature walk; and playing games, such as tag, with your kids.

Bad Habits
How can you help to reduce your chances of heart disease? Stop smoking and drink alcohol in moderation.

- Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease, according to the National Institutes of Health. When combined with other risk factors — such as unhealthy blood cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and being overweight or obese — smoking further raises the risk of heart disease.

- Smoking also is a major risk factor for peripheral arterial disease (P.A.D), a condition in which plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to the head, organs and limbs. People who have P.A.D. are at increased risk for heart disease, heart attack and stroke.

- Any amount of smoking, even light smoking or occasional smoking, damages the heart and blood vessels. For some people, such as women who use birth control pills and people who have diabetes, smoking poses an even greater risk to the heart and blood vessels.

- Smoking can also increase your risk for cancer of the lungs, bladder, throat and mouth, kidneys, cervix and pancreas.

DRINK RESPONSIBLY
Likewise, drinking too much of any type of alcohol can increase your blood pressure and contribute to the development of heart disease and stroke, according to the Heart & Stroke Foundation. The American Heart Association, therefore, recommends an average of one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. (A drink is characterized as one 12 oz. beer, 4 oz. of wine, 1.5 oz. of 80-proof spirits or 1 oz. of 100-proof spirits.)

- Drinking more alcohol not only can hurt the heart, but it can lead to alcoholism, obesity, breast cancer, suicide and accidents.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT
It’s important to have annual check-ups with a primary care doctor. Please see the back page for listings or visit www.wilkesregional.org to find a doctor.
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 200,000 Americans are hospitalized every year due to the flu. In addition to symptoms such as sore throat, aches and fever, the flu can lead to serious health complications such as pneumonia.

One of the most important steps you can take to avoid serious, flu-related illness is to be vaccinated. Each year, the flu vaccine targets what doctors expect will be the three most common strains of the flu that season. The CDC recommends that anyone 6 months of age and older get vaccinated, particularly people who are at a high risk for flu complications. This includes senior citizens, young children and people with chronic conditions such as asthma or heart disease.

In addition to being vaccinated, there are simple preventive measures you can take to reduce the likelihood of getting the flu. In general, they are the same steps you would take to avoid a cold:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Don’t touch your mouth, eyes or nose with unwashed hands, as those are places where germs easily can enter the body.
- Eat well, exercise, drink plenty of water and get enough sleep.
- Avoid being in close proximity to sick people.

If you do get sick, visit your doctor and follow his or her directions; an antiviral medication may be prescribed. To protect others, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever has gone, except to get medical care or other necessities. Also, make sure to cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Flu Buster

Getting vaccinated, washing hands improve your chances of avoiding sickness
Battle of the Bulge

Eat right this winter

Even though the holidays — with their plentiful, rich foods — are over, it’s tempting to eat more than you should and skimp on exercise during the winter months. Fortunately, there are ways to combat these urges. Here are a few ideas:

1. **Practice two-bite baking.** Instead of resisting the urge to bake and satisfy your sweet tooth, give in — but don't overindulge. Only eat the equivalent of two bites, which is usually enough to satisfy a craving. Then plan to take the baked treats somewhere outside your home, such as to work.

2. **Substitute ingredients.** If you’re craving comfort foods such as macaroni and cheese, pot pies or mashed potatoes, trade some of the high-fat ingredients for healthier, low-fat ingredients. Example: Try Greek yogurt instead of sour cream or butter.

3. **Eat your fruits and vegetables.** Winter squash, hearty greens such as kale, and cranberries are examples of seasonal produce that are great for a healthy diet. Try making broth-based soups with them, which are healthier than cream-based soups.

4. **Set a workout schedule.** Since you might be more apt to sit inside during the cold months, following a regular fitness schedule will help you stay on track.

5. **Get outside.** Many of us experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression associated with changes in season. This can lead to periods of inactivity, overeating or under-eating. To counteract some of these effects, spend time outdoors when you can, since any amount of natural light and fresh air may help to boost your mood.

**LOVE YOUR HEART**

Eating well has benefits for your cardiovascular health. To learn more about heart services at Wilkes Regional, visit [www.wilkesregional.org](http://www.wilkesregional.org) or call 336-651-8760.

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**Body Basics**

Exercise smartly to maintain your overall physical health

You don’t have to be a competitive athlete to be concerned about joint health. People who exercise regularly or have physically demanding jobs should be taking care of their joints. Repetitive motions and incorrect posture during these activities add stress to your joints, which can lead to overuse injuries or arthritis. Here are some ideas for safeguarding these critical body parts.

**BUILD MUSCLE**

When you don’t have enough muscle, your joints bear the burden of daily activity, especially your knees, hips and spine, which must support your body weight. Consider adding weight-training exercises into your fitness routine in order to strengthen your muscles and ligaments.

**PERFECT YOUR TECHNIQUE**

Proper technique is important whether you are training, competing or exercising. Posture is also important. Slouching, and sitting or standing in the same place for too long or in awkward positions, can add stress on your joints. Try breaking up repetitive activity — or long periods of inactivity — by taking time to stretch or by going on brief walks.

**BE SAFE**

Even if you have been playing a sport or participating in a certain activity for a long time, one mistake or fall can cause serious damage. Wear proper safety equipment and pay attention to any pain you feel. If you think your joints need extra support, wear braces or guards.

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Orthopedic surgeon Matthew Pifer, M.D., specializes in athletic injuries.

Contact Orthopaedic Specialists of Wilkes at 336-903-7845.
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