

# Health Connect



ANTELOPE VALLEY  
HOSPITAL

A facility of Antelope Valley Healthcare District

A community newsletter from Antelope Valley Hospital

Summer 2019



**Stroke Stuns  
Flight Nurse**

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Babies Thriving**

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# Building for the Future



Our hospital has weathered a number of changes over its nearly 65 years of serving the Antelope Valley, but one thing has remained the same: our expansive campus in Lancaster. Generations of local residents have known exactly where to find us when they needed medical care.

In addition to our building's physical structure, Antelope Valley Hospital's base is supported by our 2,500 employees. I can personally attest to the exceptional care our nurses, doctors, and support staff provide to patients every day. And for them, it's truly personal since most of our staff live locally. So when a patient needs care, we treat them like they are our family, friends and neighbors ... because they often are.

With a solid foundation in place, we are turning our attention to growth. We have made many changes over the years, but demand for care continually outpaces our space - especially in the emergency room. Expanding this area is a top priority for me. I am working with my leadership team to creatively expand the ER using modular buildings. While this is not a permanent solution, it will allow us to quickly improve patient comfort and ease overcrowding.

In the meantime, I am looking at long-term solutions to meet the growing healthcare needs of our community. We will be required to make costly structural updates to meet state earthquake standards, and yet parts of the facility still will be off-limits for patient care by 2030. That is why we must set our sights on building a completely new state-of-the-art hospital.

The good news is we're not going to do it alone. The City of Lancaster is eager to move forward with the "Medical Main Street" project, which will turn our 161-acre campus at 15th Street West and Avenue J into a hub of health and wellness activity. It will provide access to a variety of medical, fitness and health resources as well as housing in one central location. We are very excited about the impact this will have on the local economy and the people who live here.

Be on the lookout for updates in the coming months.

Sincerely,

**Edward Mirzabegian**  
Chief Executive Officer



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Cover photo:  
Stroke survivor *Melissa Reiman, RN*, reunited with her care team and REACH Air coworkers. From left *Chris Crisafi*, pilot; *Michael Ciarro*, Melissa's fiancé; *Rebecca Study*, Melissa's daughter; *Melissa*; *Henry Schuil, RN*, flight nurse; *Ada Rojas, RN*, ER nurse; *Danyelle Hummel, RN*, ER nurse; and *Ryan Trobaugh*, flight paramedic. Full story on page three.

# Stroke Stuns Flight Nurse

**M**elissa Reiman, RN, knows better than most that a headache can signal something serious. As a flight nurse with REACH Air Medical Services, she cares for dozens of sick and injured patients every week as they are transported from one hospital to another. An active single mother of a 12-year-old daughter, Melissa never could have predicted she'd be the one on the stretcher.

In late March, the 32-year-old Lancaster resident had been dealing with a headache for several days, but wasn't too concerned since she has dealt with migraines for many years and had just completed a set of 24-hour shifts. "I was about to take some medication and a nap when I looked in the mirror and saw that my left eyelid was droopy, my pupil was constricted and my tongue was pointing to the right," she said. Her instinct (and training) told her something wasn't right.

Melissa called her mother, who is a nurse at Antelope Valley Hospital, for advice. Her mother confirmed what Melissa already knew: she needed to go to the hospital. "My mom said something like, 'You're a nurse, what are you thinking?'" recalled Melissa. "I was trying to downplay it. I didn't want it to be a big deal."

The emergency department team at AV Hospital immediately recognized that Melissa was likely having a stroke. A "code stroke" was called, which brings members of the stroke team to her bedside, and she was immediately taken to have a CT scan and CT angiogram "A doctor was in the room within two minutes," she said. "That's when I realized it was serious."

The results of the tests revealed that Melissa had a tear in the inner layer of the wall of one of her carotid



*Melissa with her daughter, Rebecca and her fiancé, Michael.*

arteries. The tear was letting blood leak between the layers of the artery wall where it was forming a blood clot that was decreasing blood flow to the brain.

Melissa required highly specialized treatment. She was flown to Los Robles Hospital in Thousand Oaks where she was seen by an interventional neurologist.

Her flight team ended up being her coworkers at REACH Air. "I don't think they were expecting to see me as the patient that day!"

Melissa spent eight days in the hospital, seven of which were in the intensive care unit. While she still struggles with a droopy eyelid, occasionally stumbles over her words, and feels fatigued, she said, "I don't have much to complain about." She's grateful to have received prompt, expert care and is looking forward to a future with her daughter, Rebecca, and fiancé, Michael.

"We all know strokes can happen to anyone at any age, but we don't expect it," she adds. "If you have a headache that isn't going away, or droopy facial symptoms, don't question it, just go get it checked out. This could have been a million times worse if I'd waited."

# Hospital Benefits From Foundation Golf Tournament

**G**olfers of all abilities enjoyed the sold out 16th Annual Invitational Golf Tournament. Funds raised benefit the hospital's greatest needs. Special thanks to some of our major sponsors: AV Hospital ER physicians, G.L. Bruno Associates, HGA, Lilian L. Gong & Associates, RBB Architects Inc., AVORS Medical Group, Gallagher, and Hunter Dodge Chrysler Jeep Ram and Fiat.



Representing sponsor G.L. Bruno & Associates/HGA are Darlene Lockhart (left) and Farima Mirzabegian.



From L to R: Representing our law firms; Troy Schell, General Counsel AVH; Matthew Trotter of Carroll, Kelly, Trotter, Franzen, McBride & Peabody; and Campbell Finlay of Davis, Grass, Goldstein & Finlay.



The winning foursome, posing with hospital CEO Ed Mirzabegian (middle), included John Pryor; Prithviraj Dharmaraja, M.D.; Munif Rahal, M.D.; and James Gardner.



High Desert Medical Group foursome, from left: Edgardo Barcelona, M.D.; Alice Barcelona; Stephanie Willette; and Don Parazo, M.D., Antelope Valley Healthcare District Board secretary.

# A Homegrown Hospitalist Program

**W**hat is a hospitalist? Ferdinand Panoussi, M.D., head of AVH's hospitalist program, describes them as "physicians who are dedicated to the care of patients within a hospital setting without being in a private practice or having obligations outside of the hospital. They are fully committed to the inpatients within the hospital."

Hospitalists can care for a wide range of patients who have been admitted to the hospital, often from the emergency room. This requires hospitalists to have a broad understanding of acute care conditions. Not only are hospitalists valuable members of the hospital care team, our hospitalists are employing new technology that allows them to use an iPad to access the hospital's state-of-the-art electronic medical records system, order medications, and request lab tests directly from a patient's bedside.

*"Being at the bedside allows patients to be involved while we're putting in the orders, which is a welcome shift in how care is delivered," said Dr. Panoussi.*

The technology has the capability to show real-time results of a patient's x-rays, vital signs, CT scans, and weight. "There is great benefit to have access to all this data without being in front of computer," he added. "We think the potential is endless."

On a personal level, Dr. Panoussi enjoys being able to serve the community in which he grew up. A Palmdale High School graduate, he started his



Ferdinand Panoussi, M.D., reviews a patient record with Gayle Burkhardt, RNC.

medical training here at the hospital through the school's medical ROP program and attended Antelope Valley College before leaving the area to earn his medical degree and complete his medical residency.

"My entire family still lives in the AV community. When they are sick, they still come to this hospital," he said. "It was extremely important to come back and be able to provide the high level of service to the community that I felt was desperately needed. Being able to take care of the loved ones of people I've known for years gives me great satisfaction."



## Stories from our NICU

Since 1984, Antelope Valley Hospital's neonatal intensive care unit has helped create thousands of positive outcomes for babies who required immediate care after birth. In honor of our NICU's 35th anniversary, in the last issue of *Health-Connect* we asked readers to share their NICU stories. The response was truly heartwarming! We received so many touching stories that we are unable share them all here. Additional stories will be shared on Facebook throughout the year. **Follow @AntelopeValleyHospital on Facebook.**

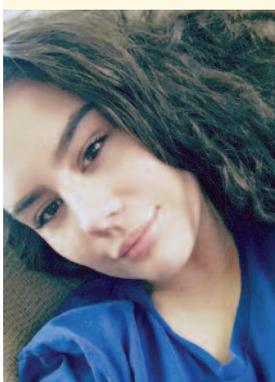
## Two NICU babies, six years apart

**William Strong** weighed just 3 lbs. 13 oz when he was born here in 1995. Today he is a graduate of Biola University with a bachelor's degree in computer science. "He spent two weeks in the NICU, and I cannot say enough about the staff," wrote his mom, **Darla Strong**.

Six years later, Darla had baby daughter **Jessica**, who weighed exactly the same as her older brother - 3 lbs. 13 oz. Now, Jessica is celebrating her high school graduation. "Jessica was five weeks premature and spent a little over two weeks in the hospital," said Darla. "I was amazed that the nurses remembered me from 1995. The first few days my daughter cried all the time. The nurses were great about letting me hold her to see if we could relax her. We received excellent care during both stays in the NICU."



*William Strong*



*Jessica Strong*

## A Thanksgiving Baby

Today **Taylor Lee Villa** is a healthy 15-year-old. One would never guess she spent the first two months of her life in the NICU.

On Thanksgiving Day 2003, baby Taylor arrived more than three months early. "She is my miracle baby thanks to the staff in the NICU at AV Hospital. I am forever grateful for them," wrote Taylor's mom, **Shawna**.

"I was terrified and didn't know what to expect. I will never forget seeing her tiny little face for the first time. I wasn't able to hold her. All I could do was look at her in the incubator and hold her tiny little finger. It was the scariest time of my life. The nurses were so nice and caring. They always kept me informed and were so supportive of my family and me. I will never forget that."



*Taylor Lee Villa*



*Lillian Eve Konya*

## Excited to become a teacher one day

In July, 2009, **Lillian Eve** was born 15 weeks early, weighing just 1 pound, 12 ounces. Her mom **Tamara Konya** wrote "I was so scared about what would happen. The doctors reassured us they would do everything they could for her. I will never forget when she was born the first thing I heard was a loud cry from her. I knew at that moment, she would be okay. The doctors immediately took her to the NICU and a few hours later, we got to visit her. Seeing her hooked up to machines in her incubator, I couldn't do anything but cry."

Lillian spent 65 days in the NICU before she was strong enough to go home. Now she is almost ten years old, a healthy elementary school student who excels in school and participates in spelling bees, art festivals and creative writing festivals. She takes dance and gymnastics classes and dreams of being a teacher one day, just like her mother.



*Ethan Johnston (left)  
with Hayden Johnston*

## The Johnston boys are thriving thanks to “the guardian angels of the NICU”

Tammy Johnston was 29 weeks pregnant when her son **Ethan** was born. He weighed just 2 lbs. 6 oz. “We were terrified. We had no idea if he was even strong enough to fight for his tiny little life. All the unknowns were swirling in our minds, then we met Dr. Thangavel and a few of the nurses. They were very optimistic about our son’s outcome. They always had a smile on their faces and were so positive! We grew closer to the staff and saw the love they poured into what they do,” Tammy wrote.

In 2015, the Johnstons were expecting again. Baby boy, **Hayden**, arrived at 30 weeks, weighing 2 lbs. 1 oz. “The guardian angels of the NICU and the many familiar faces we saw just three years ago were now taking care of our second tiny little baby. Just like before, they treated us like family,” she wrote.

“Today, our boys are thriving,” said Tammy. “We cannot thank the Antelope Valley NICU team enough for all their love, support, and encouragement during the scariest times of our lives.”

## Very low birth weights

Looking at nine-year-old twins **Joshua** and **Madison Moorhead** today, you wouldn’t know they spent the first months of their lives in our NICU. Their mother **Yvette** stayed in the hospital with preterm labor for more than three weeks before delivering the tiny babies at just 27 weeks. Madison weighed 1 lb. 2 oz. and Joshua was 2 lbs. 1 oz.

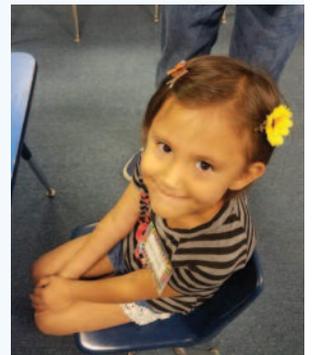


*Madison (left) with her  
twin brother, Joshua*

“Dr. Thangavel and his staff were beyond amazing. As you can imagine the low birth weights of my twins presented substantial challenges, and Dr. Thangavel was instrumental in their survival,” wrote Yvette. “My son came home 60 days later and my daughter 75 days later. My husband, **Jim**, and I could not be more appreciative. We are forever indebted to Dr. Thangavel and his staff.”

## You learn you’re stronger than you think

Jessica Alton was less than 23 weeks pregnant with twin girls when she went into labor. Despite doctors’ best efforts to stop her labor, babies **Tatiana** and **Sadie** were delivered by emergency C-section.



*Sadie Alton*

Weighing just one pound at birth, Tatiana was too fragile and did not survive. “[Letting Tatiana go] was the hardest thing I have ever had to do.”

Sadie, who weighed 1 lb. 5 oz. at birth, spent several weeks in AV Hospital’s NICU and an additional four months at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

Today Sadie is a happy, healthy and loving 5-year-old. “The emotions that come with having a baby in the NICU are overwhelming and really hard to handle at times,” Jessica wrote. “But you learn you are stronger than you think and you keep moving forward. Each day is a blessing.”

# Annual Banquet Honors Volunteers



*Volunteers were honored by hospital executives for reaching milestones years of service.*

We honored our team of superhero volunteers for helping make Antelope Valley Hospital the community's healthcare leader. Last year our volunteers selflessly donated nearly 47,000 hours of their time and talent to help our patients, staff, physicians and visitors. We are grateful for all they do!



*Volunteers Bobbie Patton (left) and Shirley Beasley were recognized for each having volunteered for more than 16,000 hours.*



*Our pet therapy volunteers and their humans got their paws in on the fun, sporting superhero capes of their own.*



*Longtime volunteer Judy Hutton with hospital CEO Ed Mirzabegian.*

## HOSPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

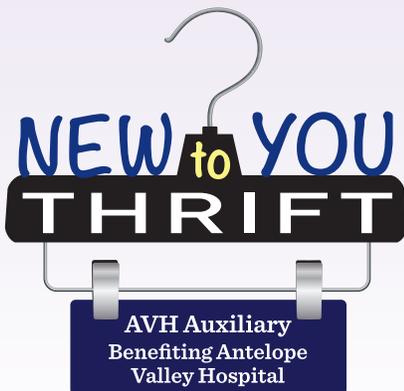
### NICU Moms Enjoy Mother's Day Brunch

Having a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit is a stressful time for new parents. To help lighten their load (even for just a few hours), former NICU mom Jessica Wade hosted a free Mother's Day brunch and painting party at the hospital for current NICU moms. The founder of Mighty Little Giants, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing support to parents of NICU babies, Jessica knows all-too-well how unsettling it can be to have a tiny baby who is fighting for his life. Her son, who spent the first few months of his little life in the hospital, is now a thriving five-year-old. During the event, moms were given the opportunity to socialize with other women who understand what they're experiencing while an instructor guided them through painting a very special Mother's Day canvas.



### AVH Women Helped Build Homes4Families

A team of female volunteers donned pink hard hats and heavy-duty gloves as part of a Women's Empowerment Build construction event to support Homes4Families. They built perimeter walls and split-rail fences for what will become a 56-home community for low-income military veterans in Palmdale.



### New to You Thrift Shop Relocated

The Antelope Valley Hospital Auxiliary's New to You Thrift Shop has moved to 44256 10th Street West in Lancaster.

New store hours are:

Monday\* - Friday: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

1st Saturday of each month: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

\* Closed the Monday before the first Saturday of the month.

Stop by and check out the great merchandise and amazing deals!

HealthConnect is published by the Antelope Valley Hospital marketing department as a service to the community. For inquiries email [marketing@avhospital.org](mailto:marketing@avhospital.org).

### Antelope Valley Hospital Contact Numbers

Main Number  
661-949-5000

Blood Donor Center  
661-949-5622

Foundation  
661-949-5810

OB Clinic  
661-726-6180

Volunteers  
661-949-5105

### Antelope Valley Healthcare District Board of Directors

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*Information in this publication is intended to educate readers about subjects pertinent to their health. Information should not be considered medical advice or treatment nor should it be used as a substitute for a physician consultation.*



## SAVE THE DATE

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Presents

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**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 | 6 PM**  
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# The Lucky Ducky Days of Summer are Back!

**Antelope Valley Hospital Blood Donor Center  
Annual Summer Blood Drive**

**June 21 thru September 23**

When you donate during the summer blood drive, you'll become a member of the Lucky Ducky crowd, a select group of blood donors that we count on to donate when our need is great. Each time you donate this summer you will receive a free rubber duck, and your name will be entered into our monthly prize drawing. **Bring in this newsletter for an extra raffle ticket.**

The Blood Donor Center offers hours to meet busy schedules. Drop by 44105 15th Street West, Suite 305, or call **661-949-5622** to set up an appointment.

## **Blood Donor Center Hours**

Tuesday and Thursday: 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Wednesday: 7 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. (1st and 3rd of each month)

*All blood donated here stays in the Antelope Valley and supports the hospital's lifesaving role in this community.*



All donors receive a **FREE CHOLESTEROL TEST**

16-year-old donors are welcome with a signed parent consent form. Download the form at [avhospital.org](http://avhospital.org).

