Flying high

GVH teams up with TriState CareFlight for emergency transportation

Gunnison Valley Hospital (GVH) and Montrose Memorial Hospital (MMH) recently teamed up with TriState CareFlight in an effort to maintain top-notch emergency services. TriState CareFlight is a critical-care transport service based in Bullhead City, Ariz. By partnering with GVH and MMH, TriState will have a helicopter stationed in Montrose.

Previously, St. Mary's in Grand Junction primarily provided critical care transport. TriState will now be the primary contact for emergency air transportation, although most patients will still be taken to St. Mary’s.

GVH looks forward to working with TriState CareFlight in an effort to keep emergency services as efficient as possible.

A TriState CareFlight helicopter comes in for a landing at the GVH helipad.
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ant to be healthier? Each of these tips requires only a minute or so of your time and offers big benefits.

1 Wash your hands. It’s the best way to reduce the risk of spreading or being exposed to germs. Scrub with soap and water for 20 seconds, or about as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice.

2 Pack safety gear. Outdoor activities can raise your risk of injury. Depending on what you’re doing, you may need to pack elbow and knee pads, a helmet, a chest protector or other safety equipment.

3 Ease back pain. Help your back support your weight more easily by standing up straight with your weight balanced on your feet. And don’t forget: No slouching at your desk.

4 Scrub those fruits and veggies with water. Even if you’re peeling them, you want to make sure you’ve removed any pesticide residue, dirt or bacteria. This goes for melons, too. The knife you cut them with can transfer bacteria from the rind to the inside of the fruit.

5 Buckle up. Wearing a safety belt lowers your risk and your passengers’ risks of being seriously injured in an accident. Make sure children are put in car seats or other age-appropriate restraint systems. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers tips on car seats and installation at www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm.

6 Read food labels. Check out how much fat, cholesterol, sodium and carbohydrates are in what you’re about to eat and take special note of the serving size. An item that contains 150 calories may not seem so bad for you, but if the package contains two servings, you’re taking in 300 calories.

7 Learn the signs of stroke. The key point to remember is that these symptoms come on suddenly: numbness or weakness (usually in the face, an arm or a leg and especially on one side of the body), confusion or trouble speaking, vision problems, trouble walking or loss of balance and severe headache. If any of these occur, get help immediately.

8 Just floss! Flossing at least once a day can remove plaque and debris, helping to prevent gum disease. Here’s how to do it right: Break off about 18 inches of floss, wind most of it around the middle finger of one hand and the rest around the middle finger of your other hand. Leave about one inch to floss the first tooth. Using your thumbs and forefingers, bring the floss up and down several times between your teeth, forming a C shape around the tooth (be sure to go below the gumline). Unwind from your finger to get a fresh piece of floss as you move to the next tooth.

9 Do a freezer check. Raw ground meats should be kept for no more than four months and cooked meats no more than two to three months—toss anything that’s older. (And make sure your freezer is set to 0° F or lower.)
Weeding, painting and scrubbing the oven all seem like pretty safe tasks. But every year, thousands of people get hurt during well-meaning cleaning sprees. Ladder injuries alone sent more than half a million people to the emergency room in 2006. Here’s how to avoid becoming a statistic:

• **Wise up to the ways of the ladder:**
  —Before you climb, make sure the ladder is sturdy and that the rungs are dry and in good shape.
  —Place it on an even, firm surface.
  —Put the ladder’s locks or braces in place.
  —Don’t climb too high. On a stepladder, stop at the second rung from the top; on an extension ladder, don’t go above the fourth rung from the top. The Home Safety Council recommends moving the base of the ladder out 1 foot for every 4 feet you climb.
  —Don’t lean too far to one side—the ladder could tip. A good rule of thumb: Don’t let your bellybutton stray beyond the sides of the ladder.
  —Don’t sit on top of a stepladder. The shelf isn’t meant to carry your weight.

• **Get rid of piles.** Clear clutter from stairs, landings and floors so you can move safely around your house.

• **Lift and carry the right way:**
  —Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
  —Keep your back straight and bend at the knees while tightening your stomach muscles.
  —Lift with your legs.
  —Enlist a helper if something is too heavy or cumbersome.
  —When climbing stairs, only carry loads you can see over and that allow you to keep one hand free for banisters and railings.

• **Skip the chemical cocktails.** Never mix cleaning products, such as bleach and ammonia; doing so can produce dangerous fumes. Read directions carefully to make sure you’re using the product correctly or try “greener” cleaning products made from all-natural ingredients that aren’t as caustic as traditional cleaners. Or you can whip up your own solvent: Use a little baking soda and water to clean the oven or combine lemon juice or vinegar with water for a nontoxic glass cleaner.

• **Get the right gear.** Wear a mask and gloves to protect your nose and hands from harsh cleaners.

• **Don’t overdo it in the garden.** Repetitive motions can cause muscle aches, so alternate between weeding, digging, planting and pruning.

• **Take a break.** You need to replenish your body’s fluids and prevent dehydration, especially in warm weather. If you feel dizzy or short of breath or have chest pain while doing household chores, call for emergency medical assistance right away. 

**Scrubbing troubles**

Household chores can be hazardous to your health
Gunnison Valley Health System has always been committed to ensuring the availability of quality, local healthcare. We’re proud to provide services not often found within county-owned health systems, such as our award-winning ambulance services and our 24-hour on-call orthopedic care.

As our area grows, we’re expanding our programs and services to meet community needs, improving hospital facilities and ensuring that we never have to turn anyone away when urgent care is required.

Last spring, the health system conducted a phone survey of 300 area households. Almost 70 percent rated Gunnison Valley Hospital as very good to excellent in overall care. The staff and physicians worked hard to earn this trust. And all 300 of us thank you.

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

We provide a continuum of care that includes an invaluable partnership with area family physicians. Local family and emergency medicine physicians play an important role in helping maintain a 24-hour emergency room.

A number of specialty physicians have been invited by the health system to travel to Gunnison from Montrose, Denver, Delta and Grand Junction on a regular basis to enable residents to stay closer to home for care.

These specialists provide treatment in cardiology; dermatology; neurology; oncology; ophthalmology; podiatry; pulmonology; urology; and ear, nose and throat. We also have one of the best home health agencies in rural America, physical and occupational therapy, an assisted living center, long-term care and hospice and palliative care.

THE COST OF CARING FOR THE COMMUNITY

Unlike other county and publicly owned and operated hospitals, we don’t receive taxpayer support, and haven’t since the 1990s. The hospital is recognized by the federal government as being critically important to the health and welfare of the community and we do receive special reimbursement for the care provided to Medicare beneficiaries.

The hospital receives 101 percent of its Medicare-allowed cost for providing such services. This represents about 80 percent of the actual cost of providing care. This is vitally important to our financial independence, and is still well below the cost of providing care, so we need to partner with the community in new ways to raise funds to cover the increasing costs of healthcare.

GROWING TOGETHER

You may have heard that the health system has started a foundation. The Gunnison Valley Health Foundation serves as the primary fundraising wing for the system. The volunteer board of 12 has worked hard at creating a true and strong foundation whose mission is to develop, preserve and provide financial resources to the Gunnison healthcare facilities to improve the quality and breadth of healthcare in Gunnison County.

Next May, the hospital will break ground on a $9 million expansion project. This exciting project will bring MRI equipment closer to the emergency room and provide a more advanced CT scanner. A Women’s Imaging Center will provide a digital mammography suite in a relaxing and private setting. The vacated space from medical imaging will provide a new home for the Gunnison Valley Cancer Center. Next to the Cancer Center will be specialty physician clinic and treatment suites.

Future funding is essential for our community hospital. The Gunnison Valley Health Foundation is kicking off a capital campaign with a goal to reach $500,000 in voluntary community support.

For many small communities, the future of exceptional healthcare close to home is uncertain. Not here. We’re working to ensure that healthcare is an absolute for future generations of residents in the Gunnison Valley. We look forward to sharing news with you as we progress through this exciting phase of growth.

As always, your support is deeply appreciated,

Randy Phelps, CEO, Gunnison Valley Health System
“A remarkable accomplishment”

GVH receives Avatar’s 2008 Overall Best Performer Award

Gunnison Valley Hospital (GVH) is one of 20 hospitals that have been recognized by Avatar International for delivering consistently high standards of patient care across multiple service lines. Avatar International is an industry leader in healthcare quality improvement services, and this acknowledgment is a recognition of its top performing hospital partners in 2008.

Since 2000, GVH has partnered with the Avatar patient satisfaction system to obtain detailed information about the care provided to patients who are admitted to the hospital.

“This award is a distinguishing honor that exemplifies the staff’s dynamic efforts to provide the best possible care,” says Gunnison Valley Health System CEO Randy Phelps. “Our consistency in receiving this award demonstrates that the community appreciates what we do here.”

The Overall Best Performance award is based on the results of the hospital’s 2008 patient surveys and represents the top 5 percent in Avatar’s national database. It’s awarded to hospitals with the highest overall combined score for inpatient care, outpatient care, emergency department services and ambulatory surgery.

“This award is a distinguishing honor that exemplifies the staff’s dynamic efforts to provide the best possible care.” —Randy Phelps, CEO

Congratulations to Gunnison Valley Hospital.”

The survey essentially acts as the hospital's report card with respect to how well we’re doing, while identifying opportunities for improvement. The hospital evaluation measures patient expectations and processes and outcomes within the departments patients were admitted. Patient feedback is vital in helping GVH achieve and maintain outstanding customer service. Comments assist our continued efforts to evolve and improve the hospital’s stellar quality and care.

> Come visit us

To schedule a tour of GVH or for more information, call 970-641-0798 or visit www.gvh-colorado.org.
When you think of global warming, you likely think of it in environmental terms: melting polar ice caps and long droughts, heat waves and other extreme weather events. But according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the World Health Organization, the phenomenon also poses a major threat to our health.

Global warming is an increase in the Earth’s average temperature, which causes increased or decreased rainfall and rising sea levels. While these may not seem to be connected to your well-being, you can directly or indirectly link them to:

- **Heatstroke.** Global warming may cause extended periods of excessive heat, which is bad news for those who are susceptible to the effects of high temperatures, including older people, children and those with heart problems and asthma. Excessive temperatures can lead to heatstroke, which causes your body temperature to soar to 104°F or higher and can lead to coma. Global warming may have been to blame for the 2003 heat wave in Europe, which, by some estimates, killed more than 30,000 people.

- **Breathing problems.** Higher temperatures and strong sunlight are contributing factors to the increase in dangerous ground-level ozone. Ground-level ozone can damage lung tissue and makes breathing more difficult, especially for those with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other chronic lung diseases.

- **Allergies.** Climate change can also worsen allergies. It seems increasing temperatures and higher carbon dioxide levels lengthen ragweed season and cause higher pollen production.

- **Heart problems.** Some studies have found that soaring temperatures and high ozone levels can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke and aggravate heart conditions in those who already have them.

- **Insect-borne disease.** While milder winters may seem like a blessing, they can be a curse. Not having those chillier temperatures means disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes and ticks don’t die off and are present in greater numbers the following season, prolonging the transmission period of diseases like West Nile virus and Lyme disease.

- **Gastrointestinal illnesses.** As the climate changes, the risk of extreme weather events such as flooding and hurricanes increases. When these disasters occur, the excess rainwater they produce can cause rivers, lakes and other bodies of water to overflow, possibly tainting local drinking water supplies and giving rise to diseases like cholera.

- **Ultraviolet (UV) damage.** Unlike that found at ground level, ozone found miles above the Earth has a protective effect. As this good ozone is depleted, higher amounts of UV radiation can reach the Earth. With repeated unprotected exposure to UV rays, we can expect an increasing number of skin cancer and cataract cases.

Want to help reverse the trend? Contact nonprofit environmental organizations like the Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org) to find out how you can help protect the Earth—and your health.
Flex your mental muscle

How physical activity revs your brain

Activity is important whether you’re 17 or 70. Besides the obvious benefits for your body—it makes your heart and lungs work more efficiently, helps you control your weight, improves muscle tone, betters bone and joint function and reduces your risk of heart disease—activity can:

• **Boost your mood.** When you work out, your brain produces endorphins—the body’s natural mood elevators. Plus, you may find that taking your anger or frustration out on a punching bag or walking off a bad day makes you feel better.

• **Help you sleep.** Getting regular activity can help you fall asleep faster and deeper, and you’ll be more productive and better able to concentrate if you get a good night’s rest.

• **Make you smarter.** A study of Canadian women over age 65 found that those who regularly engaged in aerobic exercise had cognitive function scores that were 10 percent higher than women who didn’t exercise. Being sedentary is a risk factor for stroke and dementia, and the better blood flow to the brain that comes with exercise may indeed be the link. Researchers also think that elevated blood sugar levels—a normal part of aging—can contribute to age-related cognitive decline. Activity helps keep blood sugar levels in a normal range.

• **Ease depression.** While it may not replace antidepressants, exercising for at least 30 minutes a day, three to five days a week, can improve depression symptoms and help stop relapses following treatment. It’s not clear how activity lifts depression, but it could be that it stimulates endorphin release, helps release muscle tension or reduces the amount of the stress hormone cortisol in your body.

• **Take on pain.** The throbbing pain of tension headaches can interfere with your ability to lead a normal life. But when you exercise, endorphins can help block pain signals from reaching your brain.

> **Power to the brain**

Recent research has questioned how helpful formal brain-training exercises, such as those found on video games and Web sites, really are for healthy older adults. Instead, you can get similar or even better results with these simple measures:

• **Keep in touch** with loved ones and friends.

• **Learn new things**, like how to speak a new language.

• **Volunteer with a community group** or take a fun part-time job.

• **Get a hobby.** Research your family history, do crossword puzzles or play golf.

• **Take a trip.** Check out educational travel programs that cater especially to older folks, such as Elderhostel (www.elderhostel.org). Or ask your local church group or travel agent for recommendations.
Dear neighbors,

2009 has been another busy and exciting year for us. The Gunnison Valley Health Foundation supports the hospital and health system community programs that improve the health and well-being of people throughout the Gunnison Valley—partnering with generous donors throughout the region to make our communities the healthiest places to live, work and raise a family.

WHAT’S ON THE HORIZON?

• Teaming up with the Colorado Health Foundation and Quality Health Networks to develop the Electronic Health Information Exchange throughout the Gunnison Valley
• Developing significant sources of capital as the basis for future support of the healthcare system
• Seeking support for specific healthcare system needs, such as the education of professionals for the Valley’s future needs and acquiring advanced technology to continue delivering state-of-the-art care

I invite you to join us in pursuing these goals by making a donation to the Foundation. This is your opportunity to help us continue to help others. No donation is too small (or too big). If you would like to know more about our projects or the Gunnison Valley Health System, please call me at 970-641-0798.

Cheers!

Dan Marshall
Executive Director
Gunnison Valley Health Foundation