

Appointments

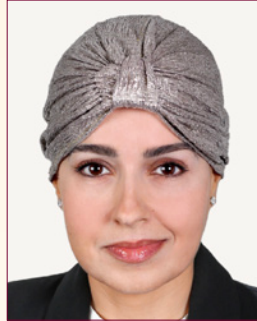
Hana Ajouz, MD, joins Brown Surgical Associates' Division of Thoracic Surgery

PROVIDENCE – Brown Surgical Associates announced that **HANA AJOUZ, MD**, has joined the practice's Division of Thoracic Surgery.

Dr. Ajouz is trained in Minimally Invasive Robotic Surgery for both malignant and non-malignant lung disease. Her special interests include anatomical lung resections.

"We're extremely excited to welcome a surgeon of Dr. Ajouz's caliber to Brown Surgical Associates," said Dr. Aurora Pryor, President of Brown Surgical Associates. "Her addition further elevates a thoracic surgical team that is already world-class and will allow us to better serve the people of our community."

Dr. Ajouz received her medical degree from the American



University of Beirut in Lebanon. She completed her surgical residency at NYU Langone Health in Long Island, NY, and her fellowship in cardiothoracic surgery with the University of Miami. In addition to her surgical duties, Dr. Ajouz has assumed the role of Assistant Professor in the Department of Surgery at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

"I am thrilled to join Brown Surgical Associates," Dr. Ajouz said. "Being part of this highly regarded practice – which encompasses dozens of highly specialized surgeons who embrace a team approach – further ensures my patients have access to cutting-edge care that is both comprehensive and collaborative." ❖

Recognition

Dr. Methodius Tuuli to be honored by Diversity and Inclusion Professionals (DAIP)

PROVIDENCE – Women & Infants Hospital is proud to share that **METHODIUS G. TUULI, MD, MPH, MBA**, Chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Women & Infants Hospital; Executive Chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Care New England Health System, will be honored by Diversity and Inclusion Professionals (DAIP) with the 2024 Linda Holmes Newton Legacy Award.

This prestigious award, now in its second year, honors a seasoned DEI leader with over 20 years of experience, whether formal or informal, who embodies the legacy of DAIP's trailblazing founder, Linda Newton.

Dr. Tuuli is recognized for his impactful work in maternal health. As Chief of Obstetrics & Gynecology at Women & Infants Hospital, Dr. Tuuli has focused on improving



quality and eliminating disparities in adverse perinatal outcomes.

"I am so grateful to accept this award as an acknowledgment of our dedicated team at Women & Infants Hospital and Care New England who are at the frontlines doing the difficult work to advance equity for the patients and the community we serve," said Dr. Tuuli.

Since its inception fourteen years ago, DAIP has been dedicated to honoring organizations and individuals in the community who demonstrate a

strong and proud commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, belonging, and accessibility.

Dr. Tuuli will be honored at an awards ceremony on Friday, September 27th hosted at Farm Fresh Rhode Island. ❖

Recognition

Lifespan Cardiovascular Institute receives highest rating from Society of Thoracic Surgeons

PROVIDENCE – The Lifespan Cardiovascular Institute (LCVI) has earned a three-star rating from The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) for its patient care and outcomes in isolated mitral valve replacement and repair (MVRR) surgery. The three-star rating, the highest STS quality rating, places The LCVI among the elite for MVRR surgery in the US and Canada. Additionally, The LCVI ranked in the 90th percentile for operative mortality in aortic valve repair (AVR), MVR, mitral valve (MV) repair and AVR/coronary artery bypass graft surgery (CABG).

The STS star rating system is one of the most sophisticated and highly regarded overall measures of quality in health care, rating the benchmarked outcomes of cardiothoracic surgery programs in the US and Canada. The star rating is calculated using a combination of quality measures for specific procedures performed by an STS Adult Cardiac Surgery Database participant. In New England, there are only three publicly reported MVRR 3-star programs, one of which is RI's LCVI and two in CT.

“Taking care of patients’ cardiovascular disease is a team sport that involves a wide multitude of practitioners working alongside each other collaboratively. At The Lifespan Cardiovascular Institute, we have all these pieces of the puzzle performing at a very high level to give patients the excellent care they need, and that translates to the excellent quality results we have had,” said **AFSHIN EHSAN, MD**, director of minimally invasive cardiac surgery and director of quality at the LCVI.

The latest analysis of data for MVRR surgery covers a three-year period – from July, 2020 to June, 2023 and includes 130 patients.

“The Society of Thoracic Surgeons congratulates STS National Database participants who have received three-star ratings,” said **DAVID M. SHAHIAN, MD**, chair of the Task Force on Quality Measurement. “Participation in the Database and public reporting demonstrates a commitment to quality improvement in health care delivery and helps provide patients and their families with meaningful information to help them make informed decisions about health care.”

The STS National Database was established in 1989 as an initiative for quality improvement and patient safety among cardiothoracic surgeons. The Database includes four components: the Adult Cardiac Surgery Database (ACSD), the Congenital Heart Surgery Database (CHSD), the General Thoracic Surgery Database (GTSD), and the mechanical circulatory support database (Intermacs). The STS ACSD houses approximately 6.9 million surgical records and gathers information from more than 3,800 participating physicians, including surgeons and anesthesiologists from more than 90% of groups that perform heart surgery in the US. STS Public Reporting Online enables STS ACSD participants to voluntarily report to each other and the public their heart surgery scores and star ratings. ❖

Newport Hospital’s Total Joint Center awarded Advanced Certification for Total Hip and Knee Replacement from The Joint Commission

NEWPORT – Newport Hospital has earned The Joint Commission’s Gold Seal of Approval® for Advanced Total Hip and Knee Replacement Certification by meeting rigorous performance standards. The certification, offered in collaboration with the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, focuses on pre-surgical orthopedic consultations, rehabilitation activities post hospitalization or ambulatory surgical center admission, and follow-up visits with the orthopedic surgeon.

“This advanced certification, achieved through the hard work and dedication of our multidisciplinary team, reflects Newport Hospital’s unwavering commitment to excellence,” said **VALENTIN ANTOCI, MD, PhD**, the medical director for the total joint replacement program at Newport Hospital. “By opting for advanced certification directly, we have demonstrated our resolve to go beyond basic standards and deliver exceptional, patient-centric care.”

The Joint Commission’s Advanced Certification for Total Hip and Total Knee Replacement highlights several key benefits for patients: Enhanced Patient Care, Improved Outcomes, Patient-Centered Approach, Multidisciplinary Collaboration, and Continuous Improvement.

“We are incredibly proud of this achievement and all those who made it possible,” said **JEFFREY GAINES, MD**, chief medical officer for Newport Hospital. “This advanced certification is a testament to the dedication and expertise of our entire team. From our skilled surgeons to our compassionate nursing staff, rehabilitation specialists and entire support teams, everyone played a vital role in reaching this milestone. This represents an incredible collaboration between Newport Hospital, University Orthopedics, the Lifespan Orthopedics Institute and The Total Joint Center at The Miriam Hospital. Our patients can trust that they are receiving the top-tier care they have come to expect from Newport Hospital, and that meets the highest standards set by The Joint Commission.” ❖

Recognition

CNE earns Worksite Health Award from BCBSRI and Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

PROVIDENCE – Care New England was recognized with an Exemplary Worksite Health Award from Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) and the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) for effective programs encouraging employee health and well-being in a meaningful way.

“As an organization, Care New England always prioritizes the health and safety of our employees. We cannot take care of Rhode Islanders and their health needs if we don’t take care of ours as well,” said **CYNTHIA RING, MBA**, Chief People Officer, Care New England. “Our dedication to the health and well-being of our team is part of what makes CNE a great place to work.”

Care New England was one of close to 50 Rhode Island businesses honored by BCBSRI and the Chamber with a Worksite Health Award at a breakfast attended by close to 50 Rhode Island Large Group Employers. The event celebrated local businesses who have demonstrated a commitment to improving Rhode Islanders’ overall health through innovative wellness programs, as companies and individuals.

Some of the highlighted programs at CNE include lactation, injury prevention, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging



Left to right: **Shannon Ferns**, CNE Healthcare and Benefits Navigator; **Jennifer Belasco**, LOA Administrator; **Modupe (Sheri) Akinforlarin**, System Director of Occupational Health; **Kathleen Lavoie**, Vice President, Total Rewards; **Lindsay Scardino**, Director of Benefits; **Jillian Bracken**, LOA Administrator.

(DEIB), Employee Recognition, and Wellness participation incentives.

“As a not-for-profit committed to the health of all Rhode Islanders, we’re delighted to continue our partnership with the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce as presenting sponsor of the 30th annual Worksite Health Awards,” said **MELISSA CUMMINGS**, executive vice president and chief customer officer of BCBSRI. “This event includes the opportunity to learn from each other’s successes and this

year we have launched a new opportunity to highlight wellness achievers, companies that have taken unique, innovative and creative approaches to prioritizing wellness and helping employees achieve and maintain their health goals.”

“By increasing morale and production, and decreasing health-care costs and sick leave, worksite health programs are a win for all involved. We applaud Care New England for committing to invest in the wellness of their team and for inspiring more Rhode Island businesses to find creative ways to help their employees live better, healthier, and happier lives. We encourage other companies to follow their lead,” said **Laurie White**, president of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. ❖

South County Hospital awarded CMS 5-Star rating

WAKEFIELD – South County Hospital has once again been awarded a prestigious 5-Star rating from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for overall hospital quality. This marks another year of exceptional care and commitment to patient safety, satisfaction, and outcomes.

The CMS rating system, which evaluates hospitals across the nation, awarded only 381 hospitals in the United States with a 5-Star rating this year, 102 fewer than last year. South County Hospital

stands out among these top performers, highlighting an unwavering dedication to delivering the highest standards of care.

AARON ROBINSON, President and CEO of South County Health, also expressed both his gratitude and pride in South County Health’s accomplishment. “Earning the CMS 5-Star rating is a significant honor. These stars stand for our commitment to excellence in healthcare. Despite the challenges faced by the health-care industry, our team has consistently demonstrated unwavering dedication to

providing quality and compassionate care to the community we are honored to serve. We will continue to focus on improving our services and ensuring that our community receives the best health-care possible.”

South County Hospital’s recognition by CMS highlights superior performance in various measures, including patient outcomes, safety, and the patient experience. ❖

Recognition

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island earns Health Equity Accreditation from National Committee for Quality Assurance

PROVIDENCE – Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) has been awarded Health Equity Accreditation by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) for its commercial health plans, recognizing the insurer's efforts to reduce health disparities and promote health equity for its members and the communities it serves.

BCBSRI is the only health insurer to achieve NCQA Health Equity Accreditation for commercial health plans serving Rhode Islanders.

NCQA's Health Equity Accreditation recognizes organizations that lead the market in providing culturally and linguistically sensitive services and work to reduce health care disparities. In awarding accreditation, NCQA evaluates how well an organization complies with standards in the following areas: organizational readiness; race/ethnicity, language, gender identity and sexual orientation; access and availability of language services; practitioner network cultural responsiveness; culturally and linguistically appropriate services programs; and reducing health care disparities.

"We are honored to receive this accreditation from NCQA, which validates our comprehensive and sustained efforts to identify and address health disparities in Rhode Island," said **MARTHA L. WOFFORD**, president and CEO of BCBSRI. "We believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to achieve their best health, regardless of the color of their skin, the language they speak or where they live. This accreditation reflects Blue Cross' long-standing commitment to advance health equity and work in partnership with the community to improve the health and well-being of our members and our communities."

The following are highlights of BCBSRI's health equity efforts:

- **Health Equity Report** – published annually from member claims data and stratified by race and ethnicity, the report, which is publicly available on BCBSRI.com, helps to illuminate racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare quality. This data is used as a roadmap for interventions to reduce those inequities in areas including:

Maternal health – BCBSRI's comprehensive maternal care program is designed to help reduce the risk of premature birth, low birthweight, and pregnancy-related complications, particularly among birthing people of color, and provide support for those experiencing postpartum depression. Other areas of focus include support for doula network expansion and diverse workforce training and implicit bias training for healthcare providers.

Colorectal cancer – To reach a goal of cutting in half the number of non-white members who are overdue for colorectal cancer screening, BCBSRI has partnered with the Lifespan Community Health Institute to reach out to these members and navigate them toward appropriate screening.

- **Voluntary self-identification** – In 2023, BCBSRI began encouraging members to update their profiles to include information about their race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, and gender identification. The goal is to enhance collection of member data to better address health disparities.
- **Safe Zones** – The LGBTQ+ Safe Zone Program certifies healthcare facilities, provider offices, and community-based organizations identifying themselves as supporters of the LGBTQ+ community. Certification requirements reflect policies, procedures, and physical space related to equity and inclusion for LGBTQ+ patients.
- **RI Life Index** – BCBSRI partners with the Brown University School of Public Health on the RI Life Index, which has surveyed Rhode Islanders annually for the past six years on their perceptions of social determinants of health.

NCQA President **MARGARET E. O'KANE** said, "The prevalence of racial and ethnic disparities has been a barrier to improving the quality of health care of many Americans for too long. Organizations achieving Health Equity Accreditation are leaders in closing this gap." ❖