

Berkshire Health Hub

COMPASSION | ACCOUNTABILITY | RESPECT | EXCELLENCE

April 2025

A Prescription for Primary Care in the Berkshires

It isn't a secret that our community is facing a serious problem with access to primary care. The challenges we face in the Berkshires, however, are a symptom of a much larger crisis that is impacting communities and health systems across the state and the country.

According to projections published by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the United States will face a shortage of up to 86,000 physicians by 2036. The current shortage of doctors, including primary care physicians, is driven in large part by a lack of graduating medical students choosing primary care, demands on the healthcare industry, worker burnout, and the retirement of clinicians.

A January report by the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (MHPC) found that roughly forty percent of hospital emergency department visits were for conditions that could have been treated or prevented with timely primary care, and Governor Maura Healey is increasing resources and support for primary care workforce development.

Berkshire Health Systems has been exploring every avenue to address the region's primary care needs, including implementing team-based care models, recruiting and training more advanced practice providers, or APPs, and expanding the BMC internal medicine residency program to include a primary care track. In this article, Medical Director of Primary Care Rebecca Caine, MD explains how this three-part strategy is a promising remedy for addressing the primary care shortage in the Berkshires.

Expanding Access Through Team-based Care

The first, most immediate strategy is implementing a team-based approach to primary care. Though BHS has long employed APPs (nurse practitioners and physician assistants) in primary care, the health system recently began transitioning to a collaborative model of team-based care in which team members share responsibilities to achieve high-quality and efficient patient care. This coordinated team approach frees up time for more patient visits and prioritizes the learning and supervision of early career APPs.

When you visit an office working under the new team-based model, your primary care team may include a recently graduated APP, a more experienced nurse practitioner, and a primary care physician who splits their time between seeing patients with more complex conditions and providing supervision and case consultation to the APPs. Each primary care provider on the team is supported by a medical assistant who performs various clinical and administrative tasks to maintain an efficient operation.

"With the help of other team members, primary care physicians have more time to care for patients with complex health issues," said Dr. Caine. "This model also allows a patient to develop an ongoing relationship with a PA or an NP, while also recognizing that the doctor is just one step removed and is engaged with the rest of the team in managing their care."

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BHS Opens New Urgent Care in Lenox

From doctors, nurses, and medical assistants to construction and facilities project managers and information technology staff, it takes a village to open a new clinic.

Now open in Pittsfield and Lenox, BHS Urgent Care clinics offer convenient access to care for minor illnesses and injuries and provides support for those unable to see their primary care provider right away. Lenox Urgent Care is open 7 days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., except on certain holidays.

Visit urgent.berkshirehealthsystems.org to learn more and book online.



Pictured here are just some of the BHS employees involved with creating the new BHS Urgent Care at 489 Pittsfield Road, Lenox, MA.

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A Letter from the President & CEO



Dear Neighbor,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Berkshire Health Hub, a new BHS newsletter for our donors and friends. Published twice a year, the newsletter will highlight important health system news and celebrate our donors who are helping us to achieve our strategic goals. Each issue will include a feature article about a topic affecting the entire health system. We will also share stories from our three hospitals, profile new physicians, and list upcoming BHS events in the community.

While we have much good news to share, I first want to acknowledge the uncertainty we are all feeling about the future of health care. While I cannot predict where we are headed, we are proud to continue our partnerships with organizations across the region that are already working to identify and address disparities that impact the health of our community. We are committed to the transformative work of advancing health equity in our system so that we can best support a vibrant and diverse community. I can assure you that BHS has a strong financial foundation, which we owe to the leadership of our Board of Trustees and our talented, creative, and dedicated employees. We are also grateful to our many donors who play a vital role in the financial health of our hospitals and programs.

This issue's feature article is about primary care. You will learn about the shortage of primary care physicians in Massachusetts and across the country, and three new initiatives we are creating to improve access to primary care in the Berkshires, as well as current education and training opportunities through our Pathways Programs.

I also want to recognize three significant contributions made to Fairview Hospital in the last several months. The late Dr. Bruce Person made a gift of over \$500,000 to be used for Fairview building projects before he passed away in September 2024. We were lucky to be able to express our deep appreciation to Dr. Person for his incredible gift at an event in August.

Fairview also received an anonymous donation of \$1 million to renovate and relocate the hospital laboratory in honor of Gene Dellea, which you will read more about in this issue. The third contribution was a \$1.8 million bequest from the estate of Helen S. Lowe to support the general operations of the hospital. We are grateful for these three extraordinary gifts and all of the gifts that support the entire health system from our many loyal donors.

Thank you all for your ongoing support. We look forward to continuing to work with you and our partners in creating a stronger, healthier Berkshire community.

Warm regards,

Darlene Rodowicz, President & CEO, Berkshire Health Systems

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

We proudly share the awards recently received by our organization. Our entire staff made it possible to achieve this national recognition.



North Adams Regional Hospital



Berkshire Medical Center



Fairview Hospital



Berkshire Internists & Lenox Family Health

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

In 2024, Martin Messinger pledged \$100,000 towards the start-up costs associated with the APP Primary Care Residency Program. His generous gift is allowing Dr. Caine and her team time to formalize the training program over its first two years of operation.



“BHS has a unique responsibility for the health and wellness of the whole county, which starts with access to primary care. I am supporting Dr. Rebecca Caine’s work to expand and improve these services in the Berkshires, and I want my gift to be a challenge for others to join me in supporting this effort”

– Martin Messinger

the lack of primary care physicians entering the medical field and increasing access in Berkshire County, Berkshire Medical Center applied for and recently received approval from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education to create a primary care track within its internal medicine residency program and expand the number of residency slots by six in total.

In the Berkshires, the limited number of specialists to manage chronic illnesses and a predominantly an aging population creates even more pressure on an already stressed system of primary care. “We have had some success in recruiting new primary care physicians, but the number of new hires isn’t keeping pace with the growing number of patients who need a primary care physician to manage their complex medical conditions,” said Dr. Caine.

According to Dr. Caine, internal medicine residents spend most of their time working in the hospital, and get comparatively little exposure to outpatient medicine during the three years they are in training. As a smaller program within the internal residency program, the primary care track will offer physicians in training more exposure to office-based medicine in primary care clinics, thereby increasing the number of patient visits. Residents can also choose elective rotations in a variety of outpatient settings, from dermatology, to gynecology, to orthopedics, giving them important experience in areas often required for delivering quality primary care.

“Creating a primary care residency track will give our residents exposure to all the areas of outpatient care they need to become exceptional primary care doctors,” said Dr. Caine. “The goal is to graduate physicians who are eager to work in primary care and are outstanding, compassionate general internists who are skilled in all aspects of primary care and outpatient internal medicine,” she adds.

Career Pathways Programs Address Workforce Shortages

The lack of primary care physicians is only one example of the nationwide healthcare workforce shortage impacting our country. A November 2024 report of the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association indicates that there are over 15,000 vacancies in the healthcare workforce across the state.

Since the BHS Career Pathways Program launched in 2022, nearly 800 participants have graduated, and BHS is seeing staffing improvements in crucial roles, such as nursing assistants, medical assistants, licensed practical nurses, and registered nurses. Each program includes paid education and on-the-job training time and covers tuition, books, uniforms and supplies, while also providing comprehensive health coverage and guaranteed employment with BHS upon successful completion of the program.

“Pathways Programs are helping to develop a talented, diverse workforce that includes individuals who would not have otherwise been able to get the training on their own, due to longstanding barriers,” said Dr. Caine.

With the support of the Board of Trustees, organizational leadership and staff, donors, and the broader community, BHS will continue to improve access and deliver the high-quality care that everyone deserves.

Supporting the Next Generation of APPs

The second component of BHS’s strategy to address the primary care shortage will be to launch an APP Residency Program that will provide supportive, structured clinical and professional education for a cohort of up to four early career APPs. This type of workforce development will build clinical confidence and professional autonomy, thereby fostering the growth of highly- skilled nurse practitioners and physician assistants in the primary care office environment.

Participants in the Primary Care APP Residency Program will engage in a comprehensive educational curriculum including on-site didactic sessions, self-learning modules, research and presentations by residents, and optional specialty rotations. The year-long training program will be followed by two additional years of practice in a BHS primary care clinic. This commitment will strengthen the recruitment pipeline and bolster clinical competence and expertise in preparation for assuming a role within BHS as a primary care provider.

“BHS is currently searching for a program director to lead this transformative initiative,” said Vice President of Physician Services Christopher Camillo, who is overseeing the development of the Primary Care APP Residency Program with Dr. Caine. “Once the program is up and running, we will have the capacity to add thousands more primary care visits, and patients will be seen more quickly.”

Expanding the Internal Medicine Residency Program

According to the MHPC report, one in five primary care physicians who sees patients in an office setting is of retirement age (65 or older), but only one in seven internal medicine residents in training is choosing to be a primary care physician. In an effort to address

Fairview Hospital Receives \$1 Million Donation for Laboratory Renovation in honor of Gene Dellea



Pictured: Tony Scibelli, Darlene Rodowicz, Barbara Alibozek, Gene Dellea, and Bart Raser

At the end of 2024, Berkshire Health Systems announced an anonymous donation of \$1 million to relocate and renovate the Fairview Hospital clinical laboratory during a December celebration welcoming Tony Scibelli to the Berkshires and to his new role as Fairview Hospital Vice President and COO. The new laboratory will be named in honor of Eugene A. Dellea, former President of Fairview Hospital, who has dedicated his career to serving the Berkshire community. Dellea is currently Vice President of Government Relations for Berkshire Health Systems.

This significant donation will support the new laboratory with an upgraded electrical infrastructure and air filtration systems that will best support new diagnostic technology and equipment. The hospital processes nearly 140,000 tests each year. A more central location on the main floor of the hospital will be more convenient for patients and allow the staff to process testing more quickly and efficiently.

“We are extremely grateful to our anonymous donors for this incredibly generous gift in Gene Dellea’s honor,” said Darlene Rodowicz, Berkshire Health Systems President & CEO. “This donation will directly improve the services our patients receive, matching Gene’s selfless commitment to helping all in our community to achieve better health and well-being.”

“Life saving decisions depend upon accurate lab testing and fast results,” said Scibelli. “This incredible gift will improve the quality of care for the more than 27,000 people who rely on the Fairview Hospital laboratory each year.”

Dellea joined the former Hillcrest Hospital in September 1955, where he quickly became the Chief Medical Technologist. During his early years, Dellea was instrumental in upgrading Fairview’s original laboratory. He was known for his commitment to preventative healthcare, organizing many community health screenings for diabetes and providing other lab services.



Become a Laboratory Science Professional

The BMC School of Medical Laboratory Science trains future professionals with hands-on education, preparing them to excel in healthcare. The program is accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences and offers an 11-month program for a small cohort of qualified students. Graduates are prepared with the knowledge, technical skills, and professional behavior required to excel in clinical laboratories and adapt to the evolving healthcare environment. The next program begins in July 2025.



Beza, 2022 Graduate

Scan the QR code to learn more



New NARH Celebrates First Anniversary

Thanks to the vision of area leaders, the hard work of countless staff, and the overwhelming support of the community, BHS formally re-opened the new North Adams Regional Hospital on March 28, 2024, ten years to the day after it closed. As a Critical Access Hospital, NARH is bringing care closer to home for thousands of patients in the rural northern Berkshire region of the county. Over the past year, NARH has continued to expand its offerings beyond inpatient care and outpatient services to include hospital-based wound care and nutritional counseling services with a registered dietitian. Functional improvements to the retail pharmacy behind the scenes have resulted in a more streamlined patient experience, and new physicians are joining the NARH-based team to expand access to key specialties like gastroenterology and general surgery. A year after its re-opening, with 843 hospital patients kept closer to home, NARH is still creating reasons to celebrate healthcare in North County.

Patients Are Saying

"I am deeply appreciative that the care is available at North Adams Hospital. The care and professional attitudes in all facets of the staff at this facility is outstanding."

"I highly recommend this hospital and hope we can keep it here in the future. Finally you feel secure with the care we have here."

"Was absolutely overwhelmed by the professionalism and caring by everyone I came in contact with..."

NARH By the Numbers

1,174 Surgeries

843 Cared for on the new 2 North Medical/Surgical Unit

16,732 Emergency Department Visits

16,954 Radiology Tests

25,108 Laboratory Tests



Thank a Resident Day!

Thank a Resident Day is a special day around the world to collectively show gratitude and appreciation for resident physicians and fellows. We rely on our residents to be compassionate doctors and mentors to our students and other trainees.

On February 28, BMC showed its gratitude by recognizing the 28 residents and fellows currently working in internal medicine, osteopathic medicine, psychiatry, and surgery for their invaluable work and contributions to our patients and community.



**PROVIDER
FEATURE**



Welcome Dr. Amarnath

Digestive health plays a big role in your overall well-being, and a gastroenterologist specializes in keeping your digestive system running smoothly. From acid reflux to complex digestive conditions, Dr. Amarnath specializes in helping your gut feel better. If you're experiencing stomach pain, bloating, or other concerns, it may be time to schedule a visit!

Talk to your primary care physician or call Dr. Amarnath's office at (413) 499-8590.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Berkshire 150 Community Exercise Program

(free and open to the public)
April 13–May 17

Fairview Senior Ambassadors Supper Club

A social evening of dining, conversation, and learning hosted by Fairview Hospital.
Monday, April 14
Monday, June 16
Tuesday, August 5

BHS Train to Run the July 4th 5K

Six-week training program with Berkshire Running Foundation begins Saturday, May 10

Red Tee Golf Tournament

Benefitting BMC Imaging
Monday, June 2
Berkshire Hills Country Club
Pittsfield, MA

Fairview Hospital Gala

Wednesday, July 16, 2025
Gedney Farm, New Marlborough, MA

BHS July 4th 5K

Friday, July 4
Downtown Pittsfield, MA

Fairview Hospital Golf Tournament

Thursday, September 4
Stockbridge Golf Club, Stockbridge, MA



Point your smartphone camera at the QR Code or visit our website berkshirehealthsystems.org/events for more details.

Berkshire Health Hub is published twice a year by the BHS Advancement Office, under the leadership of Executive Director of Advancement Jennifer Vrael. The newsletter is mailed to current donors and community partners and is available at various BHS locations. For more information about Berkshire Health Hub, or if you would like to be removed from the mailing list, please contact the Advancement Office, at development@BHS1.org, or call (413) 447-2060.

A newsletter for our donors, community partners, and patients with timely news and information about Berkshire Health Systems and its hospitals, clinics, and programs.

Berkshire Health Hub

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Berkshire Health Systems

