

Health Connect



ANTELOPE VALLEY
HOSPITAL

A facility of Antelope Valley Healthcare District

A community newsletter from Antelope Valley Hospital

Spring 2019



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Cover photo:
Dr. Murugesha Thangavel
holds newborn *David Harris*
in the AVH NICU, which is
celebrating its 35th anniversary
this year.



Hello from the CEO

I am thrilled to be back in the Antelope Valley! It's great to reconnect with friends and colleagues here and see that they have continued to excel in providing outstanding medical care while I have been away.

Our hospital's mission is to be the provider of choice for all essential healthcare services while partnering with others to improve the health of the Antelope Valley. As the area's healthcare leader, we are committed to ensuring access to a full range of programs and services. In this issue of *HealthConnect*, we highlight several service lines and illustrate how we live out our mission every day.

This year marks 35 years since we opened our neonatal intensive care unit, which has been under the leadership of **Dr. Murugesha Thangavel** since the beginning. A look at this vital community asset can be found on the next page.

Heart disease is the nation's leading cause of death, which is why we place such an emphasis on heart health. Every February, we shine a spotlight on heart disease and heart health through our annual Women's Heart Affair and Little Hats, Big Hearts program. You can see highlights from these events on pages 6-7.

It is our belief that healthcare extends beyond the walls of our hospital and into the community, where we can play a role in promoting good health and a better quality of life. That's why we partnered with the City of Palmdale to build a fitness court as well as provide complimentary sunscreen stations at DryTown Water Park. Turn the page for details about this exciting community partnership.

I am eager to roll up my sleeves and continue building upon the hospital's strong foundation as we work to improve the health of the Antelope Valley.

Sincerely,

Edward Mirzabegian
Chief Executive Officer



NICU Celebrates 35th Anniversary

The NICU staff, some of whom are shown here, works around the clock caring for the Antelope Valley's newest and smallest residents.

In 1984 Antelope Valley Hospital changed the face of newborn care in the region with the opening of the area's only neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Since then nearly 14,000 of the valley's tiniest and most vulnerable residents have received lifesaving care here.

Since the beginning, Murugesha Thangavel, M.D., has watched with pride as the NICU has grown from two small rooms to its own wing with 21 private rooms and a staff of 80, which includes nurses, occupational therapists, respiratory care practitioners, dietitians, pharmacists and social workers. Over the past 35 years, Dr. Thangavel, a neonatologist and medical director for the NICU, has nurtured thousands of miniature newborns through their first days, weeks and months of life.

"I work in a world of small people with big hearts and bright futures ahead of them," he said. "I love what I do."

Approximately 10 percent of all births are premature. At AV Hospital those delicate babies are treated to a blend of high-tech and high-touch care delivered by UCLA board-certified neonatologists, like Dr. Thangavel. Because of this, infants as small as 1.5 pounds and as early as 23 weeks have the best possible chance at leading normal lives.

In celebration of the 35th anniversary of the NICU, we are looking for your stories. Have you or someone in your family been a patient in our NICU? We would love to know where you are now. Please send your stories and photos (NICU photo and current photo) to marketing@avhospital.org along with your name, phone number and the birth year of the NICU patient.

Breast Milk Drive

Saturday, May 18, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

AV Hospital's Women & Infants Pavilion
44155 15th Street West, Lancaster

Breastfeeding mothers are encouraged to donate their own breast milk, which provides vital nutrients and antibodies to fragile newborn babies who are not able to breastfeed.

For more information call **661-726-6210**.

AV Hospital and City of Palmdale Team Up for Better Health

We have joined forces with the City of Palmdale to improve access to fitness equipment and encourage better health for local residents.



Pelona Vista Fitness Court

Soon Pelona Vista Park will feature a new fitness court presented by Antelope Valley Hospital, providing free access to a best-in-class outdoor bodyweight circuit training system. It will feature more than 30 pieces of exercise equipment arranged in stations that allow for up to 28 people to use the court at the same time.

“Regular exercise and healthy weight are important factors in reducing your risk of obesity, diabetes, stroke, heart disease and certain cancers,” said **Pramod Kadambi, M.D.**, AV Hospital’s chief of staff and a cardiologist. “We are excited about the opportunity to partner with the City of Palmdale to help improve the health of our community.”

Free Sunscreen Stations

If you forget to pack sunscreen when you visit DryTown Water Park this summer, don’t worry, we’ve got you covered. (Literally!) AV Hospital is providing complimentary sunscreen dispensers throughout the water park. We are also investing in the water park’s first aid and water safety equipment.

Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S. Sunscreen is proven to reduce the risk of skin cancer but must be reapplied at least every two hours, especially when swimming.

“People have gotten better about wearing sunscreen to protect themselves from the sun’s harmful rays, but they often don’t apply it frequently enough,” said **Waheed Murad, M.D.**, an oncologist and AV Hospital’s cancer committee co-chair. “By making sunscreen readily available to families as they enjoy DryTown, we hope people will be more inclined to use it throughout the day.”



Please share photos of you and your family enjoying the new Pelona Vista fitness court or using the free AV Hospital sunscreen stations at DryTown on Instagram and Facebook and tag @antelopevalleyhospital.



Ed with Pixel, one of our pet therapy volunteers.

Welcome Back, Ed!

After a six-year hiatus, **Ed Mirzabegian** has returned to Antelope Valley Hospital as chief executive officer, and he's eager to propel the organization to the next level.

All five members of the Antelope Valley Healthcare District Board of Directors voted unanimously to hire Ed during a special board meeting in December. His proven track record of growth and familiarity with both the hospital and the community we serve are unsurpassed.

“I am honored and excited to have the opportunity to rejoin Antelope Valley Hospital,” he said. “This hospital holds a special place in my heart, and I am focused on making sure we are here to provide vital programs and services for generations to come.”

HIGHLIGHTS

Ed previously worked at AV Hospital as CEO from 2007-2013. Under his leadership:

The hospital went from a \$12 million loss to a \$21 million profit.

City of Hope partnership formed.

Women & Infants Pavilion opened.

Institute for Heart & Vascular Care devised.

Trauma center re-established.

Groundwork laid for becoming an Advanced Primary Stroke Center and Comprehensive Community Cancer Center.

He previously served as the hospital's CEO from 2007-2013 and as chief operating officer for two years before that. During that time, Ed launched several initiatives that continue to benefit our patients today. Among them was an \$89 million renovation project to modernize and expand the facility, including:

- Adding triage bays within the ER.
- Enlarging the ER waiting area.
- Increasing bed capacity in the critical care unit.
- Opening new orthopedic and cardiac recovery units.

Ed draws from more than 20 years of experience in healthcare leadership with specific expertise in strategic planning, business development, managed care, hospital management and quality improvement. Before coming back to Antelope Valley Hospital, Ed was the regional chief executive officer for Prime Healthcare Services, which operates 45 acute-care hospitals in 11 states.

Board Chairman **Mateo Olivarez, RN**, commended Ed's proven track record in driving organizational improvements, implementing best practices, and achieving strong outcomes that directly benefit the bottom line. “He has what it takes to strengthen Antelope Valley Hospital.”



The Heart Truth

Heat disease is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Locally, the rates of heart disease and related illnesses, like diabetes and stroke, are among the highest in Los Angeles County.

In February we held two events to highlight our commitment to fighting heart disease and educate the community about better heart health.

Women's Heart Affair

Attendees to the fifth annual Women's Heart Affair were treated to informative presentations, blood pressure and cholesterol screenings, hands-only CPR training and more.

During his presentation, **Sameh Gadallah, M.D.**, AV Hospital's Institute for Heart & Vascular Care medical director, explained how women's symptoms may differ from those of men, and cautioned that women are as vulnerable to developing heart disease as men are. This point was underscored by his patient and fellow presenter **Alyse Dunlap**.

A heart attack survivor, Alyse described her experience, including pain in the center of her chest that felt like she had swallowed a golf ball. She recalled her disbelief at the realization she was having a heart attack. Now, five years later, she encourages women to pay attention to their bodies, manage their health and stress, and get their hearts checked.

Donna Termeer, field representative for Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, learns CPR from an AMR paramedic.



A women's heart affair attendee gets her blood pressure taken.



The Antelope Valley Blanketeers show off some of the knitted hats they created for babies born at AV Hospital in the month of February.



Kelsey Muir of the American Heart Association presents a plaque to hospital CEO Ed Mirzabegian for our support of the 2018 Heart and Stroke Walk.

Little Hats, Big Hearts

Every year 40,000 babies are born in the U.S. with a congenital heart defect. Thanks to exceptional medical care and ongoing research, most of those babies go on to lead normal, productive lives.

This is largely true in **Rochelle Johansen-Elliott's** case. Despite having heart surgery at age 15 to repair her heart defect, she has enjoyed an active and healthy life and now has two young daughters of her own.

In an effort to bring attention to congenital heart defects and the importance of instilling heart-healthy habits in our children, the hospital participated in the American Heart Association's Little Hats, Big Hearts program for the second consecutive year. As part of this program, babies born during American Heart Month in February receive handmade red hats. The **Antelope Valley Blanketeers**, a local group of crocheters and knitters, make hundreds of miniature caps for the American Heart Association each year.

Rochelle shared her story during a Little Hats, Big Hearts reception. Stealing the spotlight was day-old **Delilah Acevedo**, who was one of nearly 400 babies born at our Women & Infants Pavilion in February to receive one of the red hats.



Rochelle Johansen-Elliott holds newborn Delilah Acevedo inside the hospital's Women & Infants Pavilion.

More Than a Sliver of Hope

David Hagnes served as a volunteer chaplain here at Antelope Valley Hospital for seven years until one day in 2007 when he suddenly didn't feel well. After experiencing profuse sweating, dizziness and the feeling he was going to pass out, David felt like he couldn't walk. The cause of his symptoms came as a shock.

The last day I served as a hospital chaplain was the day my liver failed," he said. "I could hardly walk, I could barely breathe."

David immediately visited his doctor who had him rushed via ambulance to AV Hospital. There, his wife Debbie was told her husband was suffering from total liver failure.

Over the next several years while waiting for a liver transplant, David routinely visited the hospital. He endured frequent bouts of encephalopathy, a condition where toxins from the liver reach the brain and cause memory loss and other cognitive difficulties. The Hagneses were grateful for the care David received during that time, "The nurses were great," he recalled.

After seven years on the transplant list, a match was found! David received a new liver in 2014. This June marks five years since that life-saving operation. "It's really a miracle that I'm still here because I was pretty much gone," David said. "Doctors said mine was one of the worst cases of encephalopathy they had ever seen."



OneLegacy Ambassadors Debbie and David Hagnes.

He credits AV Hospital for helping save his life. He was originally diagnosed here, and we cared for him over the years while he waited for a donor liver. He is also grateful for the organ donor who provided him with the ultimate gift: the gift of life. Today, he and his wife share their story with others as OneLegacy ambassadors, volunteers who inspires others to become organ and tissue donors.

DONOR

To register to become an organ donor, call (866) 797-2366 or visit donatelifecalifornia.com.

No One Dies Alone

Retired teacher and hospital volunteer **Lynda Critchfield** is called to the hospital to visit a special type of patient: one who is facing death and doesn't have any loved ones nearby to be by their side. Lynda is one of 20 volunteers trained last year expressly for the "No One Dies Alone" (NODA) program. Spearheaded by our palliative care team, NODA received overwhelming volunteer support when it was introduced in spring 2018. Since that time, these unique volunteers have served as compassionate companions to a dozen patients, totaling nearly 300 hours.

Facing death alone without the support of loved ones can be a traumatic experience. The NODA program allows volunteers to act as compassionate companions and offer comfort to dying patients. Started in 2001 in Oregon, the NODA program has spread to hundreds of hospitals, hospices and care facilities across the country. Antelope Valley Hospital is the first medical center in northern Los Angeles County to introduce the program.

Admittedly nervous at first because she didn't know what to expect, Lynda quickly became comfortable in this new role and now considers it an honor to provide companionship to patients who are at the end of life. When sitting beside a patient, she talks to them, plays music or reads aloud.

"I truly believe they hear what's going on. I talk to them like I talk to a friend" she said. "I introduce myself, tell them what day it is and what the weather's like outside."



From left to right: *Kenia Noriega, social worker; Kevin Brubaker, chaplain; Lynda Critchfield, No One Dies Alone volunteer; and Miranda Jennings, RN, palliative care coordinator.*

While NODA volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds, the one thing they all share is a desire to provide solace, comfort, dignity and respect to patients who otherwise might be completely alone.

"Being a compassionate companion gives me a sense of peace about that time of life," Lynda said. "I feel they know I'm there for them."



To volunteer for No One Dies Alone, call 661-949-5102.

Hospital Foundation Provides Vital Support

The foundation board presented a check for \$285,000, proceeds from the 2018 gala, to CEO Ed Mirzabegian and members of our emergency and mental health departments.



Established in 1975, the Antelope Valley Hospital Foundation raises funds for the hospital's current needs and long-range growth, such as facility upgrades, innovative equipment, and other resources that help create a healthier community. As the area's only nonprofit hospital, AV Hospital provides care for anyone regardless of ability to pay. The foundation's contributions help the hospital meet the needs of our ever-growing population.

Over the past decade alone, the foundation's fundraising efforts have brought in \$6 million to improve our services. That impact is felt in every corner of the hospital. They have provided funds for state-of-the-art equipment in pediatrics, the Women & Infants Pavilion,

pharmacy, pastoral care, mental health, the emergency department, the Institute for Heart & Vascular Care, radiology and surgery. The foundation's most recent contribution of \$1.6 million allowed us to replace furniture throughout the hospital and Women & Infants Pavilion.

"We are grateful for the support and generosity of the local community and all donors who show their commitment to the hospital through our fundraising events," said Johnny Zamrzla, AVH Foundation chairman. "We also appreciate our foundation board whose hard work and guidance help us raise much-needed funds to continue delivering exceptional healthcare right here in our community."

Volunteer Groups Support Fundraising Efforts

Antelope Valley Hospital Auxiliary

The Volunteer Auxiliary raises funds for the hospital through the hospital gift shop, New to You thrift shop, bake sales and other seasonal fundraising events. Past pledges have benefited the Women & Infants Pavilion, emergency department expansion, and equipment for the critical care unit.

Alpha Charter Guild

The Alpha Charter Guild helps build a healthier community by supporting hospital programs and services through annual fundraising events, such as the prestigious Debutante program. The guild has contributed thousands of dollars to the NICU, family resource center and forensic services unit.

HealthConnect is published by the Antelope Valley Hospital marketing department as a service to the community. For inquiries email marketing@avhospital.org.



Pediatric patient Roque Larios races against Antelope Valley Hospital Child Life Assistant Maribel White during a round of Mario Kart using the Starlight Fun Center donated to the hospital.

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

Starlight Fun Center Shines for Pediatrics

Children facing a stay at Antelope Valley Hospital, the region's only facility with a pediatric unit, now have access to something new: a Starlight Fun Center mobile gaming system. Donated by the Starlight Children's Foundation, the system includes a Nintendo Wii U with games like Mario Kart 8, Wii Sports and Super Mario Galaxy. The cart can be moved to a patient's bedside or enjoyed in our playroom.

Surge Tents Improve Disaster Readiness

In the event of a high-casualty event such as a natural disaster or an active shooter, we will be even more prepared for an influx of trauma patients as we are the first medical center in Los Angeles County to receive four disaster preparedness surge tents. Provided by a grant from the county, the rain-resistant tents include LED lighting, air conditioning and heating. Plus they can be turned into hazmat decontamination rooms if needed.



Antelope Valley Healthcare District Board of Directors

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**ANTELOPE VALLEY
HOSPITAL FOUNDATION**
A facility of Antelope Valley Healthcare District

invites you to attend the

16th Annual Invitational Golf Tournament

Monday, May 6, 2019

Sand Canyon Country Club

27734 Sand Canyon Road | Santa Clarita

For more information, please call the AVH Foundation at 661-949-5810,
send an email to theresa.lemus@avhospital.org, or visit avhospital.org/golf.