

STEVEN L. STRONGWATER, MD, NAMED CEO OF STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

where a system might be imperfect and develop solutions to prevent problems. When you have gotten the system nearly perfect, you have developed what is referred to as a 'highly reliable system.' Part of my job is to continue Stony Brook's forward progress on its journey to becoming a highly reliable system, and the Patient Safety and Quality Council will greatly contribute to that process."

Stony Brook University Hospital is already at the forefront of patient safety on a national level, with patient safety specialists who are highly regarded and invited to speak nationally to share advances put into place at SBUH. In addition, SBUH's mortality statistics are among the best in the country when compared to University Health System Consortium peer institutions, and it has been a long established goal to continue in that direction. Hospital-wide mortality at Stony Brook has been a strong quality indicator, showing a steady decline over the past three-and-a-half years. In 2003, the hospital-wide mortality rate at Stony Brook was 2.01 percent compared to 2.22 locally and 2.39 nationally; through September of 2006, mortality declined to 1.71 percent compared to 2.14 percent locally and 2.33 percent nationally.

Over the past three years, Stony Brook's Heart Center has made tremendous strides in reducing the time heart attack patients undergo angioplasty from the time they arrive at the hospital. A study out in March, 2006 in the journal *Circulation* showed only about one-third of heart attack patients get angioplasty within the American Heart Association's recommended 90-minute window. Through its Code H protocol, the Heart Center at Stony Brook has systematically reduced its "door-to-balloon time" for heart attack patients to consistently below 90 minutes as of June 2006.

The primary focus of the patient safety program at Stony Brook is to follow the tenets outlined by the Institute of Medicine's "Crossing the Quality Chasm." This includes programs for safe, effective, timely, efficient, equitable, and patient-centered care. Incidents resulting in actual or potential patient harm are traced back to their root cause, and system fixes are put in place to prevent future potential adverse events. It is in the best interest of patient safety to understand system flaws and work to reduce them.

"Front-line healthcare workers are a rich source of information about specific contributions that would increase the safety of their environment," said Dr. Strongwater. "Enhancing patient safety requires creating a culture in which openness and learning are valued."

Concerned with bringing compassion back to healthcare, Dr. Strongwater believes that in the 21st century, healthcare institutions around the country have been inundated with new technology and regulatory demands that have led hospitals down a path of limited personal interaction with patients.

"Technology is good and regulation important, but there needs to be a reassessment of how we interact with the most important member of the healthcare team—the patient," said Dr. Strongwater. "Communication and patient education are very important elements for patients and their families, which will be a key focus of our work. Patients want to leave the hospital when they feel better, but they need more communication at discharge to better manage their health so they don't have to come back. We will be evaluating the best approaches to improving the overall patient and family experience."

NEW FACILITY FOR



Stony Brook's new state-of-the-art 65,000 square-foot facility for outpatient services is now open. Located adjacent to the Ambulatory Surgery Center, on the Medical Center campus, the center demonstrates Stony Brook's commitment to make its exceptional healthcare services easily accessible to patients and provide a setting where multidisciplinary care can thrive.

The roadway to the new outpatient center and the Ambulatory Surgery Center has been named Edmund D. Pellegrino Road in honor of Dr. Pellegrino, the first Vice President for the Stony Brook University Health Sciences Center and first Dean, School of Medicine. Dr. Pellegrino set the course of our institution along its road to greatness, and during his 57 years in medicine, he has launched thousands of doctors upon their medical careers and continues to impart to students and physicians a reverence for humanity and a commitment to ethics in the practice of medicine.

The building was designed and constructed with patient comfort and the streamlining of services foremost in mind. Easy access, valet parking, and comfortable waiting areas with widescreen televisions and Internet access are just some of the amenities offered at the site. Perhaps

WHY DOES A PREGNANT WOMAN MISCARRY? *This is the second of a three-part series.*

By Richard Bronson, MD, FACOG

The causes of pregnancy loss are often different when miscarriage occurs early in the first trimester, rather than late in that trimester, or within the second trimester. Most commonly, miscarriages that happen early in the first trimester result from either a genetic cause, due to the embryo having an abnormal number of chromosomes (human cells normally contain 23 pairs of chromosomes), or a hormonal cause, due to the pregnant woman not having enough of the hormone progesterone. This hormone is essential for allowing the embryo to grow within the uterus, and if there is not enough of it, miscarriage will occur. After an egg is released from an ovary in the process called ovulation, the ovary produces progesterone, which helps to create the "fertile bed" in which the embryo grows to establish a normal pregnancy. To

determine the best treatment if low progesterone is suspected, the first step is to evaluate its cause. It can be associated with an abnormal increase in the hormone prolactin, which normally plays a role in getting the body ready for milk production during pregnancy. Prolactin can be abnormally high in non-pregnant women with hypothyroidism in which the amount of hormones produced by the thyroid are low; during use of certain medications; and in the presence of a "benign" tumor of the pituitary gland that in itself is not dangerous to health.

It is possible to measure the level of progesterone in the blood during a pregnancy to confirm that there is enough of this hormone. It is also essential to measure the level of another hormone, called hCG (human chorionic gonadotropin), at the same time.

This hormone is produced by cells that form the placenta within the uterus, in which a fetus would later grow. The rate of increase in its level provides a measure of the health of the embryo. The hCG hormone makes the ovary produce large amounts of progesterone to help maintain pregnancy. Low levels of progesterone may be a reflection of a poorly developing embryo that is destined to miscarry, rather than being the cause of the miscarriage. If hCG levels do not rise normally when measured over several days, there is a strong likelihood that the embryo itself is not healthy. Measuring the levels of both hormones, hCG and progesterone, helps to distinguish cause and effect.

If a second miscarriage occurs, it is very important to send any pregnancy tissue (whether passed on its own

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STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER



STEVEN L. STRONGWATER, MD, NAMED CEO OF STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL



Steven L. Strongwater, MD, an experienced and highly regarded hospital administrator, began his new position as CEO of Stony Brook University Hospital (SBUH) on January 1, 2007. Dr. Strongwater had headed John Dempsey Hospital at the University of Connecticut before joining Stony Brook.

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In announcing his appointment, University President Shirley Strum Kenny said, "Dr. Strongwater has the depth of experience in academic medicine and the strong administrative skills we sought. People rely on us to provide the highest quality of care, and he is just the right person to make sure that Stony Brook is second to none in that area."

"Stony Brook is a remarkable hospital with an outstanding workforce and medical staff and is supported by a thriving scientific research enterprise and a world-class university," said Dr. Strongwater. "That makes Stony Brook a powerhouse in the region, and our objective is to be the best possible hospital we can be. We will serve our patients with humanity, skill, and human touch, creating an environment that is safe and supportive of patient needs and also builds upon the knowledge discovered by Stony Brook scientists and clinicians."

Dr. Strongwater's appointment came shortly after Stony Brook received full accreditation from the

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Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations and nearly two months after the National Research Corporation (NRC) announced that the Medical Center was named a 2006/07 "Consumer Choice Award" recipient for the Long Island metropolitan area.

Before joining the University of Connecticut, Dr. Strongwater was Medical Director at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. He also was a Professor of Medicine in the Division of Rheumatology and Immunology. He graduated from the University of Rochester magna cum laude with a degree in biology in 1974. He earned his medical degree with honors at the SUNY Upstate Medical Center in 1978 and was selected to join the national medical society Alpha Omega Alpha.

Dr. Strongwater's most immediate plans for the hospital include establishing a Patient Safety and Quality Council comprised of local and national quality experts, community residents, physicians, and a range of healthcare professionals who understand the issues facing healthcare delivery systems. The Patient Safety and Quality Council will provide broad perspectives on how to promote patient safety, enhance patient satisfaction, improve medical outcomes, and identify strategies to restore compassion to medicine.

"Hospitals can be considered 'complex adaptive systems,'" said Dr. Strongwater. "To assure the best medical outcomes, we must continually examine

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Do you have heart disease? Find out about a support group for this and other illnesses

 **STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER**

OUTPATIENT SERVICES OPENS

most importantly, the facility serves as the ideal setting for patients, families, and Stony Brook's healthcare professionals to partner in the diagnosis, management, and treatment of disease.

Stony Brook University Cancer Center Outpatient Services

At one end of the building is a dedicated entrance to the Cancer Center, where care is provided for medical, surgical, and pediatric oncology, in addition to other infusion services. The outpatient Cancer Center offers:

- **Patient Navigators, who are nurses assigned to patients to help guide them through the multidisciplinary process, assist in making appointments, and provide valuable information**
- **Consultation rooms where physicians and patients can meet in private**
- **Comfortable patient-centered stations for examinations, chemotherapy, and other infusion services and treatments**
- **On-site services, including imaging and laboratory**
- **The availability of cancer clinical trials that bring new and promising therapies to the forefront of care**

Pediatric Hematology/Oncology

The Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Suite is designed to meet the special needs of children with cancer and blood disorders. The new suite features added space for chemotherapy treatment and examinations, and a private transfusion room. A playroom and game area, along with a wide screen television, and

Dr. Richard Bronson's clinical interests include providing treatment for couples who have experienced delays in planned conception or repeated pregnancy loss, and developing tests to evaluate immunologically-mediated infertility, with special focus on immunities to spermatozoa. He has studied the biologic basis of fertilization failure, and his work has led to discoveries that provided a better understanding of sperm-egg interactions leading to successful fertilization. Dr. Bronson is a past president of the American Society of Reproductive Immunology and associate editor of the journal Human Reproduction.

at home or at the time of the cleaning of the uterus in an operating room) for chromosome analysis. This will help to determine whether the miscarriage was associated with an embryo containing an abnormal set of chromosomes or not. At times, the pregnancy tissue obtained under these circumstances may no longer contain living cells and, unfortunately, no information may be obtained. If the chromosomes of the embryo are normal, it becomes important to look for non-genetic causes that may create conditions leading to miscarriage.

Women can be born with an abnormally shaped uterus that makes them inclined to have a miscarriage. When an embryo destined to be a female grows, the uterus forms when two primitive tubes—the Mullerian ducts—grow together and are joined.

colorful photographs lining the hallways and exam areas help to create a nurturing and pleasant environment for children.

Outpatient Imaging Center

Opposite the entrance to the Cancer Center is the entrance and parking area dedicated to the Outpatient Imaging Center. The Imaging Center is equipped with the most advanced diagnostic tools to provide the highest quality of care from experts in advanced imaging, including board-certified radiologists. A full range of services includes:

- **Conventional x-ray, MRI, bone mineral density scans, ultrasound, and the highly sophisticated positron emission tomography/computed tomography (PET/CT)**
- **A picture archiving and communications system (PACS) that allows for rapid access to computerized images at multiple sites**
- **Compact disks containing patients' imaging studies**

The Carol M. Baldwin Breast Care Center

Visitors to the Baldwin Breast Care Center enter at the Imaging Center entrance. The Carol M. Baldwin Breast Care Center champions a multidisciplinary team approach to care and is highly specialized in the treatment of breast cancer. Surgeons, radiologists, and oncologists work as a team to offer the most advanced care for patients. Services include:

- **Mammography, including three digital mammography machines and a specialized R-2 computerized mammogram double-checker**
- **Image-guided biopsy procedures**

Sometimes this fusion of tissue is incomplete. A wall (septum) then may be present within the middle of the uterus that can result in abnormal development of an embryo, leading to its loss. This septum can be removed by a relatively simple operation, performed under anesthesia in an ambulatory surgery center. Other abnormalities of the uterus may also lead to miscarriage, in either the first or second trimester, such as a single- or double-horned uterus that is misshaped. These congenital (present at birth) abnormalities of the uterus cannot be easily corrected by surgery. It is known that they may be associated with a weakening of the lower end of the uterus, called the cervix, which may open on its own in the second trimester and lead to pregnancy loss. Monitored by repeated ultrasound examinations during pregnancy, the cervix can be closed with a

- **Surgical biopsies and therapies, including sentinel node biopsy**
- **State-of-the-art breast MRI and MRI-guided biopsies**

- **Genetic counseling, social worker services, and support groups**

The Pain Management Center

Located in the same area as outpatient cancer services is the Pain Management Center. A team of pain management specialists that includes fellowship-trained physicians are dedicated to the treatment of patients with chronic or cancer pain. Services include:

- **Individualized treatment plans appropriate to each patient's needs**
- **Treatment modalities including interventional pain procedures such as nerve blocks, epidural and transforaminal injections, and sacroiliac joint injections; radiofrequency neuroablation; and surgical pain procedures such as spinal cord stimulation and implanted intrathecal programmable pumps**
- **Complementary techniques including acupuncture therapy**

The opening of the new outpatient facility is the culmination of years of planning and the hard work of many. This most recent expansion and growth of Stony Brook University Medical Center is just one of the many strides taken to ensure that patients receive the best care available anywhere.

stitch, if necessary.

Sometimes, a miscarriage may lead to future miscarriages. This happens when the uterus does not completely empty its contents after a miscarriage, resulting in persistent bleeding and possible infection, and the need for a subsequent D&C (dilation and curettage). These circumstances might cause scarring within the uterus that prevents the uterus from growing normally during a subsequent pregnancy, leading to early or later miscarriage. This scarring needs to be removed before a woman attempts to become pregnant again. An x-ray study can be performed to diagnose the presence of scars within the uterus, as well as to confirm whether the uterus has a normal shape.

TARGET FITNESS WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Day & Evening Programs

Designed for adults with weight management or other health-related problems such as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, or high cholesterol, this 12-week program consists of weekly one-hour sessions that will guide participants through individualized strategies and goals to develop research-based skills to facilitate gradual and permanent weight loss.

**Stony Brook University
Medical Center**
Tuesdays, 1-2 pm

- May 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; June 5, 12, 19, 26; July 10, 17, & 24

Fee: \$180

**Stony Brook University,
Student Health Center**
Tuesdays, 12 noon-1 pm

- May 8, 15, 22, 29; June 5, 12, 19, 26; July 10, 17, 24, & 31

Fee: \$180

Stony Brook Technology Park
Tuesdays, 5:30-6:30 pm

- May 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; June 5, 12, 19, 26; July 10, 17, & 24

Fee: \$180

OSTEOPOROSIS PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT SERIES

This series of four group visits is presented in an integrative, holistic fashion with focus on measures that may be added to conventional treatment such as nutrition with whole foods, supplements, yoga, and exercises to improve hip and spine bone density. Conventional monitoring techniques and medical intervention with hormone replacement therapy and drugs is also covered.

Wednesdays, 4:30-6:30 pm

- May 2, 9, 16, & 23

Stony Brook Technology Park
Fee: Most insurance plans with appropriate co-pay are accepted. For those without coverage, the cost for the series is \$150.

CARDIAC EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

This six-week heart disease awareness program conducted by healthcare professionals provides patients, families, and friends with a comprehensive overview of heart health and important information about the factors that influence heart disease. CPR training classes are offered to participants in conjunction with the program. Registration is required.

Thursdays, 6-8 pm

- May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; June 7

Stony Brook Technology Park
Free

SKIN PROTECTION LECTURE AND CANCER SCREENING

In observance of May as Melanoma Awareness month, the Departments of Surgery and Dermatology at Stony Brook University Medical Center are joining forces to provide a free skin protection lecture and skin cancer screening to the public. Free skin care products and information will also be available. Call HealthConnect® for additional information or to schedule an appointment.

- Saturday, May 5, 11 am-3 pm

**Holiday Inn Express,
East Setauket**
Free

WITNESS WALK 2007

This fourth annual walk coordinated by the Witness Project of LI, a collaborative effort of the Stony Brook University Cancer Center and the Town of Babylon, is designed to raise awareness about breast cancer within African-American communities. The five-mile walk through Babylon Township begins at the Wyandanch Nutrition Center and ends at Babylon Town Hall, Sunrise Highway, Lindenhurst. Volunteers and sponsors are needed. Call HealthConnect® for a program brochure.

- Saturday, May 5

Registration: 9 am

Walk: 10 am

**Start Line: Wyandanch
Nutrition Center**

LOOK GOOD...FEEL BETTER PROGRAM

Offered in conjunction with the American Cancer Society for women with cancer undergoing treatment, this free, two-hour beauty program is facilitated by a licensed cosmetologist. Included are tips on skin and hair care, makeup instructions, and demonstrations of wig, turban, and scarf use. Registration is required.

Mondays, 6-8 pm

- May 7
- June 4

Stony Brook Technology Park
Free

11th ANNUAL CODY COMEDY FESTIVAL

Headliners Joey Kola, Dan Wilson, and Ted Alexandro are back by popular demand to benefit the Matt and Debra Cody Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities at Stony Brook University. Pre-comedy festivities begin at the Funny Bone Reception and include a catered buffet dinner with live and silent auction prizes. Many sponsorship and underwriting opportunities are available. Call HealthConnect® for more information.

- Wednesday, May 9

**Funny Bone Reception
(5:30 pm) and show: \$150**

**Student Activities Center
Comedy Show (8 pm): \$25**
**Stony Brook University Staller
Center for the Arts**

WOMEN'S HEALTH LECTURE SERIES

Pelvic Floor Dysfunction

Learn about the causes and treatment of pelvic floor dysfunction. Registration is required.

- Monday, May 14, 7-8:30 pm
Speaker: Laurie E. Budnick, MD

Sachem Public Library
Holbrook

CHARITY GALA TO BENEFIT SUNRISE FUND

Hosted by the Knights of Columbus, this charity gala will honor Alfred Tisch, former Suffolk County Sheriff, and benefit the Sunrise Fund's Pediatric Oncology Program at Stony Brook University Medical Center.

- Saturday, May 26

Cocktails: 7 pm

Dinner: 8 pm

Hyatt Wind Watch, Islandia
Tickets: \$75

NATIONAL CANCER SURVIVORS DAY

A celebration of life to acknowledge Stony Brook University Medical Center's continuing care and concern for cancer survivors. The program includes food, carnival games, entertainment, empowerment, and resources for cancer survivors of all ages. Registration is required.

- Sunday, June 10

11 am-2 pm

**Ward Melville Educational &
Cultural Center**
Stony Brook Village Center
Free

HIP AND KNEE PAIN SEMINAR

Presented by Stony Brook University Medical Center's Joint Replacement Center seminar topics cover the normal anatomy of the hip and knee and call attention to signs and symptoms of what can go wrong, such as tendonitis, bursitis, synovitis, meniscal tears, and osteoarthritis. Learn how to get a good diagnosis and find out about treatments involving diet and nutrition, exercise, medication, knee arthroscopy, and hip and knee replacement surgery. Call HealthConnect® for upcoming seminar dates.

- Monthly Seminars, 9-11 am

Stony Brook Technology Park
Free

Research Studies

ALOE VERA STUDY FOR CHILDREN WITH IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS)

Volunteers, ages 8-17, are needed to participate in a study to determine if drinkable aloe vera will decrease the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome in children.

CRACK OR COCAINE PROBLEMS?

Crack and cocaine users, 18-60 years old and in good health, are needed for participation in brain imaging medical research assessing the effects of cocaine on the brain by researchers at Brookhaven National Laboratory. Confidentiality maintained. A participation fee will be paid and transportation will be provided.

COLON CANCER PREVENTION CLINICAL TRIAL

The Department of Cancer Prevention at Stony Brook University Medical Center in conjunction with the General Clinical Research Center seek men and women age 50 years or older who have a history of colon cancer or colon polyps. The goal of the study is to determine the effectiveness of taking a new form of aspirin, called "Nitro Aspirin" to prevent the development of colon cancer or to prevent the return of colon cancer in those who have had the disease. Eligible subjects who complete the study will receive up to \$1,500.

DO YOU HAVE HEART FAILURE?

The Heart Failure and Cardiomyopathy Center at Stony Brook University Medical Center and University Physicians at Islandia are seeking volunteers with heart failure for studies to determine whether understanding blood flow can be used to improve quality of life; if some patients will benefit from implantation of a pacemaker to improve overall heart function; and, if recommendations by a heart failure nurse specialist to a physician (internist, family practitioner, or cardiologist) can improve quality of life and lower risk of dying. All consultations and studies are performed at no cost to patients.

DO YOU HAVE HEART FAILURE? HAS YOUR DOCTOR RECOMMENDED DIALYSIS TO REMOVE FLUID?

If you are hospitalized at Stony Brook University Medical Center and scheduled to undergo ultrafiltration, because your diuretics are not removing excess fluid, you may be eligible to participate in a study on the hormones that regulate your body's fluid balance.

DO YOU HAVE PROSTATE CANCER?

If you are on injection therapy for prostate cancer, you may be at risk for bone loss (osteoporosis). In this study, you can have your bone density checked for free. If you are currently receiving injections for treatment of your prostate cancer, you may qualify for this study being conducted by doctors at the General Clinical Research Center at Stony Brook University Medical Center.

HIV CLINICAL TRIALS

The HIV Clinical Trial Center of Stony Brook University Medical Center offers numerous clinical trials of new medications or combinations of medications for the treatment of HIV for the newly diagnosed patient with HIV and for patients who have developed a resistance to their current therapy. Clinical trial appointments, laboratory studies, and in most cases, medications, are dispensed free of charge. Compensation is offered for time and travel.

STUDY OF HIV+/AIDS AND CHROMIUM PICOLINATE

The General Clinical Research Center at Stony Brook University Medical Center is seeking volunteers, 18 years of age and older, with a diagnosis of HIV+ or AIDS to research the effectiveness of chromium picolinate in the treatment of complications of current HIV therapy including insulin resistance (leading to diabetes), and possibly body fat distribution (HIV lipodystrophy). Volunteers are offered compensation up to \$2,050 plus transportation expenses.

STUDY OF INSULIN SENSITIVITY IN PATIENTS WITH HIV+ AND/OR AIDS

The General Clinical Research Center of Stony Brook University Medical Center is seeking volunteers, 18 years of age and older, with a diagnosis of HIV+ and/or AIDS to participate in a study researching insulin sensitivity in HIV (leading to diabetes), and possibly fat distribution (HIV lipodystrophy). Participants will receive compensation up to \$2,450 plus transportation expenses.

STUDY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF PRENATAL OB ANESTHESIA CONSULTS (POBAC) ON BIRTH OUTCOMES

The General Clinical Research Center at Stony Brook University Medical Center is recruiting participants to determine if prenatal obstetric anesthesia consults in the third trimester improves maternal and infant birth outcomes. Participants will receive compensation up to \$50.

TREATMENT STUDY FOR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL CONTROL PROBLEMS

Stony Brook University's Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is conducting a study supported by the National Institute of Health of treatment steps for children, ages 6-14, who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other behavioral control problems such as aggressiveness, explosiveness, and low frustration tolerance. Eligible children receive free evaluation and study treatment, including medication and help with behavioral support strategies. Eligibility requires prior treatment with medication for ADHD.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR MEMORY TESTS AND MRI

The General Clinical Research Center at Stony Brook University Medical Center seeks healthy men and women, ages 18-55, who are willing to undergo a series of memory tests and a brain MRI for this study. Compensation of up to \$370.

WITNESS PROJECT OF LI ON THE GROW

The Witness Project of LI is recruiting African-American leaders who live or work within the eastern communities of Suffolk County to assist with the Project's outreach into churches and other community-based organizations. Volunteers, survivors, and interested community persons in the Towns of Brookhaven, Riverhead, and the Hamptons are especially needed. Call HealthConnect® for more information.



NATIONAL HOSPITAL WEEK

Stony Brook University Medical Center, in cooperation with Simon Smith Haven Mall, will celebrate National Hospital Week by providing health screenings, demonstrations of cutting-edge technology, and presentations by staff members of many hospital services. Find out what is new at Stony Brook University Medical Center and meet with healthcare providers.

**Wednesday, May 23, 2007,
10 am-3 pm**

**Smith Haven Mall, Center Court
Lake Grove**

RESOURCE CENTER RELOCATES

The Resource Center has relocated from the main lobby in Stony Brook University Medical Center (SBUMC) to 3 Edmund D. Pelligrino Road, adjacent to the Ambulatory Surgery Center on the east side of Nicolls Road. SBUMC's walk-in Resource Centers are places where you can stop in to obtain important information that can assist you in making informed healthcare choices. The Community Resource Center is located at 115 Main Street, Stony Brook. If you are interested in learning about a particular medical condition, a specific test or procedure, or need to find a healthcare practitioner, our staff is prepared to help. Call HealthConnect® for more information.

For more information and to enroll in studies, call HealthConnect® at 631.444.4000

Ask the Experts at Stony Brook University Medical Center

MAY IS ALLERGY AND ASTHMA AWARENESS MONTH

Q *What is asthma?*

A Asthma is a disease in which the airways become narrowed in response to a number of stimuli such as pollen, house dust, cold air, mold, or animal dander. Patients complain of being short of breath, coughing, or wheezing. Taking inhaled medications called bronchodilators, such as Ventolin, can reverse the airway narrowing. Sometimes however, the airway narrowing gets very severe, and the patient may need to go to the emergency room for treatment.

Q *Can asthma attacks be prevented?*

A Medications called inhaled corticosteroids are very effective at preventing daily asthma symptoms and severe asthma attacks. Measures to reduce exposure to dust, mold, and animal dander should also be undertaken.

Q *Are inhaled corticosteroids safe?*

A When taken regularly at low doses, these medications are relatively safe. They can cause throat irritation, and patients should rinse their mouth with water after using them. Higher doses in children can slow growth. It is therefore important for physicians to use the lowest effective dose.

Q *What other medications can be used to control asthma?*

A For people with mild asthma, medications called leukotriene blockers can be taken as pills. Singulair is the most commonly used medication in this class. For patients with more difficult to control asthma, a combination of an inhaled corticosteroid and a long-acting bronchodilator (marketed as Advair) is often used. For severe attacks of asthma, short courses of corticosteroid pills (Prednisone, Medrol) are used. Prednisone is quite safe in short

courses (less than a week is usually enough), but should not be taken long-term by most patients because of significant side effects that can develop over time.



Thomas O'Riordan, MD, is an Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine and Public Health in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at Stony Brook University. He has been at Stony Brook since 1999.

Q *"I can't take the cold, but I am not looking forward to the spring, because I am usually stuffed up and bothered by allergies. I am in my early 30s and as I get older, it seems that my allergies get worse and last longer. As I age, should I worry about these allergies turning into asthma?"*

A The relationship between aging and asthma is unknown. A risk factor such as cigarette smoking may change one's risk for developing adult-onset asthma and may overlap with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). "Post-viral asthma" and "fixed airway obstruction" (not responding to inhalers) are types of adult-onset asthma that are more common in the elderly. Research suggests that genetics may play a role in developing asthma.

Regardless of age, sensitivity to allergens is related to a decline in lung function. For example, if your body makes a specific allergic antibody to tree pollen (you have positive skin tests with associated symptoms), you are at risk for asthma. The more pollen you are exposed to, the worse your risk for disease.

Putting children with allergic rhinitis on allergy shots (immunotherapy) may, in some cases, prevent asthma. So, if you never had immunotherapy as a child, you may be at greater risk of developing asthma as an adult.

Over time exposure to air pollution and fire (smoke) is associated with increasing symptoms of asthma. Seasonal fall ragweed pollen is harmful to the lungs. Because of its physical and chemical properties, ragweed pollen can cause lung injury. Repeated and intense exposure to ragweed can lead to symptoms resembling asthma. Global warming is to blame, because when carbon dioxide levels are doubled, ragweed plants will produce 61 percent more pollen. Ragweed pollen counts were at their highest level on the East Coast last year. Mild winters, followed by wet early springs, then dry days, cause the release of more pollen into the atmosphere.

Symptoms of asthma are often irregular. You may have had asthma in the past, which may have gone away, but now has recurred. In adolescence, asthma is more common in boys than in girls, and later in life, it is more common in men. According to new research, estrogen may be beneficial to the lungs.

The bottom line is that you should see your primary care physician or specialist for a complete evaluation.



Anthony M. Szema, MD, FCCP, FAAAAI, FACP, is an Assistant Professor of Medicine and Surgery at Stony Brook University School of Medicine and Chief of the Allergy and Clinical Immunology Section of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Northport, NY. He has completed three fellowships at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in pulmonary diseases, clinical adult and pediatric allergy/immunology, and critical care medicine. In addition, he is the principal investigator of a National Institutes of Health award regarding the airway response to anaphylaxis modulated by Vasoactive Intestinal Peptide (VIP). Last year, Dr. Szema and his mentor, Sami I. Said, MD, Distinguished Professor of Medicine, Physiology and Pharmacology at Stony Brook University, reported that the gene for VIP is an "anti-asthma" gene (Szema et al., American Journal of Physiology, Lung Cell and Molecular Physiology, 2006).

STROKE PROGRAM ONLY JCAHO CERTIFIED PROGRAM ON LONG ISLAND

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) awarded Stony Brook University Medical Center's Primary Stroke Center Certification with the Gold Seal of Approval™ for stroke care after an on-site review last October. The program is also certified by the New York State

Department of Health. Stony Brook is the only hospital on Long Island to receive the certification from JCAHO and was one of the first three hospitals to be certified in New York when receiving initial certification in 2004. Only nine other hospitals in New York State are currently JCAHO certified.

Led by stroke fellowship trained Candice J. Perkins, MD, who is board certified in neurology and vascular neurology, the Stroke Program at Stony Brook is dedicated to establishing a higher standard of medical care for individuals afflicted with stroke.

May 8th is Stroke Alert Day at Stony Brook University Medical Center. Call HealthConnect® to find out more about a free stroke screening.

