

Vital Signs

Women: The heart of our families

Vital Signs

VITAL SIGNS

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

March 13 – an anniversary no one is excited to celebrate – the two years from the day we tested our first COVID-positive patient at Kaweah Health. In addition to COVID, I have a number of updates for you, including redrawing our District's five geographic zones, and our efforts to plan for a more modern medical center.

COVID-19

I will always respect people's freedoms and right to choose, but my best advice today is to get a booster. It will not keep you from getting the virus, but it will help prevent severe disease, hospitalization, and death. Unlike what we saw last year our hospitalized COVID patients tend not to be as sick; we have fewer people in the ICU and on ventilators. Almost 70 percent of the hospitalized patients are over age 50 and the vast majority of them have chronic or long-term health conditions.

We continue to perform emergency surgeries, outpatient "elective" surgeries not requiring admission to the hospital, and those deemed urgent or emergent by physicians. Visitors are allowed back into the Medical Center, one new visitor each day for most patients, and we have broadened exceptions for all patients, including patients in isolation with COVID-19. Through this pandemic, we have a cumulative operating loss of \$17.6 million, after receiving \$54.4 million in federal and County stimulus funds, for which we are grateful. We will always be incredibly grateful for the kindness you have extended our healthcare team and ask that you continue to support them by doing your part to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Rezoning

We have started our rezoning process and seek your input to help us redraw our five geographic zones to ensure they are balanced and representative. We have a series of upcoming in-person and virtual public meetings (times and dates are available at kaweahhealth.org/redistricting), and our goal is to involve you as much as possible in the process, which will be completed in April. Current zone maps are available at kaweahhealth.org/maps. Kaweah Health is governed by a board of directors made up of five publicly-elected directors, elected by zone for four-year terms. The district is a 183-square-mile boundary encompassing Visalia, Goshen, and parts of Ivanhoe and Farmersville.

Master Plan

Last year we asked the community's feedback regarding two possible options for a more modern hospital. Between online and in a series of 20 community focus groups comprised of nearly 200 people, the overwhelming preference was for a single, nine-story tower estimated to be less expensive compared to the two-tower option and because it was a smaller footprint, preserving space for future expansion.

As a result of community feedback, our Board has asked us to proceed with the next phase of planning. This includes much more detailed concepts for the design from our architect, RBB, which will also help us refine the cost estimates. Once we have these cost estimates, we plan to use town halls, online meetings, website updates, social media, focus groups, newspaper articles, and more to update our community, and to provide opportunity for you to provide feedback. Kaweah Health is committed to funding as much of this as we can, but we will need community support to build a new, modern hospital designed to serve our community for the next 50 years. Stay tuned.

I will leave you with a reminder to take care of yourself this year. As a result of the pandemic, so many have delayed much needed medical care. Please, make that doctor's appointment; you and your doctor are a team when it comes to your overall wellness. Seeing your doctor regularly allows you to make your health a priority and to stay on track with screenings, which can find diseases or health conditions before you have signs or symptoms.



GARY HERBSTChief Executive Officer of Kaweah Health

KAWEAH HEALTH

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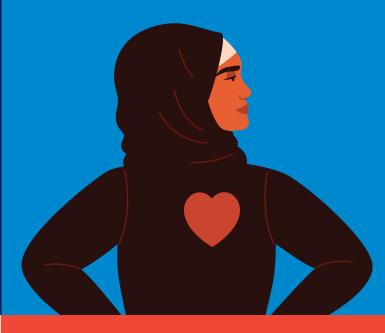
Zone 5

Ambar Rodriguez

THE HEART TRUTH

Heart disease is a deadly threat to women. Yet, very few know the facts about the illness that can cost them their lives.





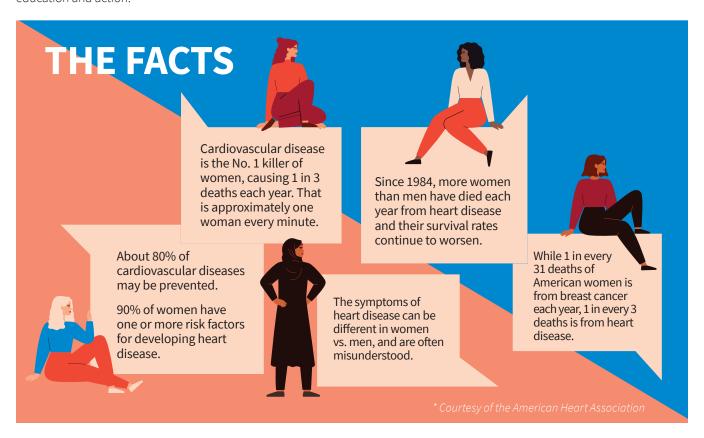




nowledge is power, and the more a woman knows about heart disease, the better chance she has of surviving it. According to the American Heart Association, the alarming fact of the matter is this: cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 killer of women, causing one in three deaths each year. That is approximately one woman every minute, and the cause of more deaths in women than all cancers combined. Fortunately, we have the power to change those numbers—80 percent of cardiac and stroke events may be prevented with education and action.

WHAT CAUSES HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease affects the blood vessels and cardiovascular system. A buildup of fatty plaques in your arteries, a process called atherosclerosis, is the most common cause of heart disease, also known as coronary artery disease. Numerous problems can result from atherosclerosis, which narrows the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through. When blood flow is difficult, a blood clot can form and lead to a heart attack or stroke. Unhealthy lifestyle habits are the leading



The first step to making a difference is to understand the misconceptions about heart disease in women, beginning with the fact that it does not affect all women the same, and warning signs for women are not the same as men. Although those facts are largely misunderstood, they only begin to scratch the surface of the misconceptions that could be putting you at risk.

These facts shed light on a heartbreaking truth: we need to do a better job of educating ourselves and the women in our lives about heart disease. More education equals more lives saved. Here is what you need to know about the causes of heart disease and ways you can prevent it from threatening your life.

CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF HEART DISEASE

Although heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, only one in five American women believe it is the greatest threat to their health. Also worrisome is the fact women are less likely to call 9-1-1 when they are experiencing symptoms of a heart attack. It simply does not occur to them to make that emergency call. When you consider the bulk of media attention on heart disease is focused on men, it is not surprising women do not relate their symptoms to a heart attack and do not seek immediate help.

contributors to heart disease. Lack of exercise, poor diet, smoking, and being overweight can all lead to atherosclerosis.

But the concern doesn't end there. Heart disease can appear in other forms as well, including:

- Heart failure or congestive heart failure: This means that the heart is still working, but it isn't pumping blood as well as it should, or getting enough oxygen.
- · Arrhythmia or an abnormal rhythm of the heart:
- This means the heart is either beating too fast, too slow, or irregularly. This can affect how well the heart is functioning and whether or not the heart is able to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs.
- Heart valve problems: This can lead to the heart not opening enough to allow proper blood flow. Sometimes the heart valves don't close and blood leaks through, or the valve leaflets (strong, thin flaps of tissue that open to let blood move forward through the heart) bulge or slip into the upper chamber, causing blood to flow backward through them.

HOW CAN I PREVENT IT?

Many things can put you at risk for these problems – some you can control, and others are simply out of your hands. But studies show that healthy choices have resulted in 330 fewer women dying from heart disease per day. Here are a few lifestyle changes you can make to maintain a healthy heart:

TAKE CONTROL

- Don't smoke
- Manage your blood sugar
- Get your blood pressure under control
- Lower your cholesterol
- Know your family history
- Engage in regular, healthy, physical activity

Additionally, Kaweah Health was a Five-Star Award Recipient for the treatment of heart failure, heart attack, coronary bypass, and valve surgery – and for the sixth year in row, received a Cardiac Surgery Excellence Award. These honors, as well as others in various specialties, helped make Kaweah Health the most awarded hospital in the Central Valley.

NO MORE BROKEN HEARTS

Although being honored as one of the nation's best health providers is an outstanding achievement and demonstrates our commitment to being a world-class organization, the true honor for Kaweah Health lies in the life-saving care we provide the community. There is still quite a bit of work to be done to make heart disease a thing of the past. But the most important lesson to remember and share is that with the right information, education, and care, heart disease in women can be treated, prevented, and even ended. Educate yourself and take action against heart disease. Say goodbye to a broken heart, and hello to a fresh start with a healthy, happy heart.

HEART CARE AT KAWEAH HEALTH

Our community is at the heart of everything we do. That is why 37 years ago, we brought heart care to Visalia and the greater Central California region. It all started with cardiac catheterization, a procedure that helped us tell patients how well their hearts were working. While that remains an important offering today, we now offer a full range of cardiovascular services, including cardiothoracic and vascular surgery, non-invasive cardiology, advanced diagnostics, same-day discharge, cardiac rehabilitation, and much more. We also operate five cardiac catheterization labs, two cardiovascular operating rooms, and one hybrid operating room.

Kaweah Health took heart care to great new heights in 2019 when it proudly affiliated with Cleveland Clinic Heart, Vascular, and Thoracic Institute, ranked #1 in the nation for heart care since 1995 by U.S. News & World Report. As affiliates, Kaweah Health and Cleveland Clinic's heart program share best practices in patient care, outcomes measurement, quality reporting, and

clinical research. In addition, physician teams from both entities work together to accelerate advances in heart care treatments and protocols.

The quality and breadth of services we offer in a community this size often amazes experts, and in 2021, Healthgrades, a national benchmarking and reporting agency, released a study in which Kaweah Health was named among the top 5 percent of the nation's hospitals and recognized as one of America's 50 Best Hospitals™ for Cardiac Surgery for five years in a row.



Our community is at the heart of everything we do. That is why 37 years ago, we brought heart care to Visalia and the greater Central California region.

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The world needs more love. And so does your heart.



That's why Kaweah Health has worked for more than 30 years to build Central California's best heart care program. On our journey to world-class care, we've become one of America's top 50 hospitals for cardiac surgery and are proud to be in affilitation with Cleveland Clinic's Heart, Vascular & Thoracic institute, ranked #1 in the nation for heart care since 1995 by U.S. News & World Report.

You can trust your heart health with us. So when it's time to show your heart some love, start with a visit to your doctor. To find a Kaweah Health cardiologist near you, visit kaweahhealth.org/healthyheart.



In affiliation with



Honoring Our Heroes

2021 World-Class Employees of the Month and Employee of the Year



JANUARY

Cora Rodgers

Clinical
Pharmacist - Lead



MARCH
Robert E.
(Blake) Pierce
Registered Nurse



MAY
Liset
Magallanes
Registered Nurse

Cora is always full of positive energy and thoughtful to all she works with. She takes incredible ownership of her work, and makes a difference every day for our patients and team. She collaborates effectively with medical staff to manage medications and spends time educating patients and their families. Cora is an absolute joy to work with and makes a difference each day.

Blake joined 5Tower in early 2020 while facing extreme adversity: a new unit during a global pandemic. Still, he brought his very best every day. He provides safe patient care and uses a solution-oriented approach to make positive changes in his work unit. Blake is encouraging, honest, and uplifting. He makes everyone feel welcomed, appreciated, valued, and most of all, loved.

Liset provides nothing short of world-class care to every patient, every time. She advocates for her patients and always carries a smile on her face, even under the most troublesome circumstances. She exemplifies our mission and is an empowering nurse who provides an ideal work environment, delivers excellent service, and comes to work every night to serve others.



Monica Bolton Occupational

Therapist III

Monica has worked for Kaweah Health for 25 years. She is an expert in treating neurological patients and cares for each person with clinical excellence. Monica ensures her patients have the tools to succeed and return to the highest quality of life after an illness or injury. She is a mentor to staff, a passionate community educator, and a perfect example of providing world-class care.



APRIL

Annette
Padilla
Licensed Psychiatry
Technician

Annette is simply amazing. Her energy and bedside manner are outstanding. She makes every patient feel great about themselves, never leaving anyone out. If a patient is aggressive or sad, you can always count on Annette to uplift their spirits. She truly cares for our patients and our team is lucky to have her. You just know it's going to be a good day when working alongside Annette!



Larissa Dodson Senior Financial Analyst

Larissa has gone above and beyond by assisting outside her job duties. She helps during staff shortages and always does so with a positive attitude. Larissa is an outgoing team player and a great mentor in the department and organization. She takes pride in her work and makes sure others are always taken care of. We are thankful to have her on our team.



Jodi Chaires Application Analyst III

Jodi is the personification of a team player. She approaches everything with a "can do" spirit, never says no, and always goes the extra mile for her customers. She is appreciated by everyone she works with. Jodi's expertise during the pandemic was indispensable. She is essential to the work done by the Revenue Cycle Support Team and respected by all.



Renee Crain Registered Nurse

Renee is an amazing nurse who is loved by her patients and their families. Her work in the Hospice Department is truly her calling. Her compassion and professionalism never waivers, and her patients often express their appreciation for her on their final journey. She is kind, generous with her time, and advocates for better care practices. It is evident that Hospice care is Renee's heart and passion.



Alice always has a smile on her face and performs her work to the very best of her abilities. She is willing to help others any time and goes out of her way to ensure patient insurance needs are taken care of. Her compassion for others always shines through and her friendliness is appreciated by every person she interacts with. Alice is selfless, a role model to others, and a professional woman of integrity.



Wendy Walters Community Care Coordinator

Wendy's personality, presence, and love of helping others makes our organization a better place. In her role, Wendy supports her leadership and is a training resource for new employees. She is a wealth of knowledge about community resources for patients and goes above-and-beyond for others, carrying out her job duties with excellence. Wendy embodies our mission statement and is a pleasure to work with.



Brisana Flores Social Worker

Brisana is a strong, intelligent, compassionate social worker who thrives on advocating for our most vulnerable patients and families. Her knowledge and understanding of the social worker profession help her navigate our most challenging cases with a graceful professionalism that helps everyone involved feel better about the services provided. Brisana is a true blessing who positively impacts many lives.



Maria Aguilar Charge Nurse

Maria is a very knowledgeable charge nurse. She is a role model for others and a great leader. She is also an amazing team player who is ready to help her coworkers when needed. Her communication skills are impressive, which her patients and their family members appreciate when in her care. Maria is down-to-earth and kind to everyone she meets. She is professional, detail-oriented, and appreciated by all.

EMPLOYEEOF THE YEAR



Molly Niederreiter Director of Rehabilitation Services

Molly is a therapist who has faithfully served Kaweah Health patients since 1994. For the last four years, she has managed the therapy department (promoted to director in late 2021), while also providing direct patient care at the bedside.

Throughout the pandemic, Molly worked seven days a week to ensure patients with COVID-19 received therapy, and was one of the first therapists to pioneer the road to recovery for our COVID-19 patient population. She is a leader, educator, and advocate within the walls of the hospital. Her selfless nature is also evident in her contributions to the community. She has coached local sports teams and opened the doors of her own local business to help alleviate childcare challenges at the peak of the pandemic.

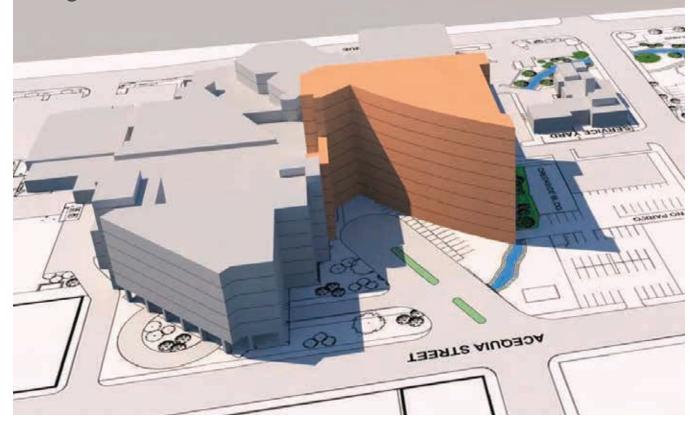
Molly leads by example with grace and integrity, and inspires her team to be their best. She is a resilient leader whose kindness, strength, and positivity have a profound impact on her patients, team, and the community we serve at Kaweah Health.

Health is our passion.
Excellence is our focus.
Compassion is our promise.



A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Kaweah Health has a plan for growth to meet our community's needs for generations to come.



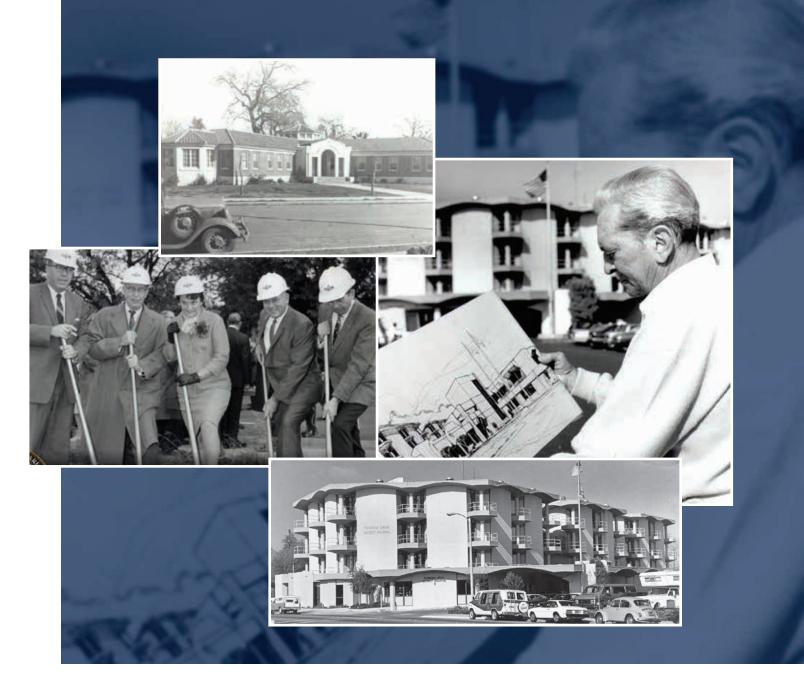
lot has changed since 1969 when the Mineral King Wing of our downtown hospital opened its doors. It was the year we put a man on the moon, the year of Woodstock, and six years before personal computers were released to the general public. In 1969, Visalia only had 27,000 residents, and the new hospital wing was considered state-of-the-art. It is now the only hospital with its unique design still standing.

But times have changed, and so has our region. Visalia is now home to 140,000 residents; five times the size it was in 1969. Over the years, Kaweah Health has expanded to match the healthcare needs of the growing community, and while the Mineral King Wing has served the Kaweah Health team and our community well over the last 50 years, it no longer meets the needs of our patients, visitors, employees, or the physicians practicing in the community-owned hospital. Kaweah Health now offers trauma care, open heart surgery, brain surgery, complex orthopedic procedures, vascular surgery, and advanced cancer care—services that were not envisioned when the Mineral King Wing was built.

That is why it is vital for Kaweah Health and the community to work together to develop an affordable way to replace the Mineral King Wing and expand access to care in our region. Modernizing the medical center is necessary to meet the healthcare needs of future generations, and is the primary focus of Kaweah Health's "Master Facility Plan"—a roadmap to the next 50 years of care at Kaweah Health. The plan will help us ensure our children, and their children, continue to have access to excellent healthcare right here in Tulare County.

What Will Modernization and the Master Facility Plan Address

The first issue the plan will address is the need for more patient care space. Put simply, the rooms in the Mineral King Wing were not designed for today's medical equipment or computers. The rooms are small and the "pie" shape makes it difficult to bring all of the necessary equipment into the room. It is also very challenging for a patient's family and friends to comfortably visit in these small rooms. The infrastructure,



including electrical, plumbing, and added computer wiring is also nearing capacity. A contemporary building with larger, more functional rooms will elevate Kaweah Health's ability to provide world-class care to the community.

In addition to building a new facility, Kaweah Health is trying to find creative solutions to meet the State's guidelines, including working closely with the California Hospital Association to change legislation and extend the 2030 deadline for seismic compliance. California regulations (SB1953) indicate that the 53-year-old building does not meet State earthquake standards and cannot be used for acute inpatient care beyond 2030. But, the need to modernize only increases with time as the building continues to age and the community continues to grow. Our region cannot afford to wait and lose the 206 beds in the Mineral King Wing if the State's timeline is not extended.

Besides the addition of new patient care units and meeting impending earthquake regulations, the master facility plan will help us determine how we best develop:

- New facilities and services at Kaweah Health to care for the community;
- Our ability to increase the community's access to healthcare;
- Modern facilities that help us recruit and retain the best physicians, nurses, and staff; and,
- Solutions for areas that are currently a challenge, including parking. A 500-space parking structure is an important and much needed part of the plan.

How was the Current Master Facility Plan Developed?

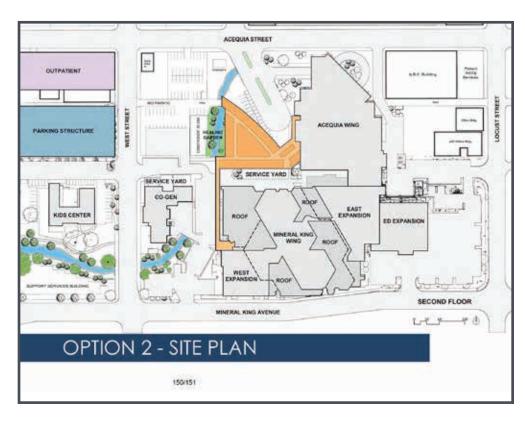
The current Master Plan is actually the latest edition to a process which started more than twenty years ago. Kaweah Health's first master plan to address the need for more capacity was finalized in 2002 and focused largely on

consolidating all of the healthcare system's services into one downtown campus, to be built over time in multiple phases. The first phase of this plan was the Acequia Tower, which was completed and opened for patient care in 2009. As our community grew, the master facility plan has adjusted to a more flexible model for the needs of our community, now and in the future.

In 2016, in an effort to involve the community and Kaweah Health staff early and throughout the planning process, Kaweah Health formed and has worked closely with Community Advisory Committees (CAC) comprised of experts and local residents to determine whether we can bring the Mineral King Wing into compliance with State

seismic requirements. With cost and efficiency in mind, a number of options were carefully and extensively researched, including retrofitting the current building. However, retrofitting was ruled out early on when it was determined that bringing the Mineral King Wing into seismic compliance for acute care would take years to complete and severely impact patient care by reducing beds and the medical center's overall capacity. Ultimately, the options were narrowed down to two choices designed by RBB Architects. In the fall of 2021, the two replacement tower options were presented to our employees, medical staff, and the public, as well as 20 diverse stakeholder groups for input to determine which of the two options would best serve the community's needs now and for generations to come.

The feedback gathered from our team and community was invaluable and imperative to the master facility planning process. On December 20, 2021, based on the research, feedback, and findings gathered over the last six years, the Kaweah Health Board of Directors authorized Kaweah Health management to proceed planning for the replacement choice that came out on top – a nine-story building with 240 new beds, a new pharmacy, and a new dietary services and cafeteria area, accompanied by a necessary 500-space parking structure. The total cost is projected at \$550 million, which is approximately \$100 million less than the alternative option, which would have constructed two shorter hospital buildings. The proposed new patient rooms would be consistent with current best practices in modern hospital design, and would be larger at 254 square feet (allowing family members to stay overnight), with proper-sized bathrooms, and room for vital medical equipment to provide a safer, overall experience.



What's Next for Master Facility Planning?

Since receiving approval from the Kaweah Health Board of Directors to continue planning, hospital leadership has been working with RBB Architects to develop more detailed design work for the nine-story building. Being mindful of the changes we need to anticipate to ensure the community's investment considers all of the needs of a new tower. Conceptual plans and renderings are being drawn to determine what the floors and rooms will look like when done. This type of space planning is helping Kaweah Health establish more refined costs and an architectural framework that will best serve the community for the next 50 years.

The advanced designs and detailed space plans will be completed this spring; at which time, the master facility plan will once again be presented to the community and staff for additional review and feedback. A highly-anticipated part of the project includes full-size models of the proposed patient rooms, which Kaweah Health plans on building for the public to visit and see how much bigger and more functional the new units will be. The models will be open to all community and staff members to visit and provide recommendations, and will demonstrate Kaweah Health's continued commitment to full transparency and inclusivity throughout the planning process.

From the beginning, Kaweah Health has remained committed to a highly transparent planning process. Once we have worked with our employees, medical staff, and community to refine the design of the new medical center, we will confirm the cost estimates and share them openly. Kaweah Health is committed to funding as much of the new construction as we can safely afford. At the same time, we cannot take on too much debt to maintain sufficient cash flows to support operations. For those reasons, we will need to seek public support in the form of general obligation bonds. When that

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time comes, we will be completely open and transparent, sharing all of the numbers and research that went into the master facility plan and how that translates into bond rates for the community-owned hospital.

The Next Step on our Journey to World-Class Care

In 1969, the Mineral King Wing of the medical center opened to replace the Visalia Municipal Hospital. The outdated building is currently at the heart of much of the acute inpatient care we provide, including where we treat patients battling cancer, deliver newborn babies, and perform emergency, life-saving surgery. The Mineral King Wing also houses our cafeteria, pharmacy, and many of our operating rooms. When it opened, it was a leading-edge facility, but now the building is 50 years old and serves a community five times larger than when it opened.

Modernizing the community's hospital is a priority for Kaweah Health, and an important and impactful next step on our journey to becoming a world-class healthcare provider in Central California. After decades of experience, we have learned that progress in medicine lies not only in enhancing what is, but in advancing toward what can be. We know the health of our community is influenced by how well we win the hearts and minds of great doctors, nurses, and employees who will help us build the compassionate and expert team our community needs. The new hospital tower will improve our community's access to care, as well as provide a modern facility where the Kaweah Health team can more excellently care for our families and friends as we move into the future.

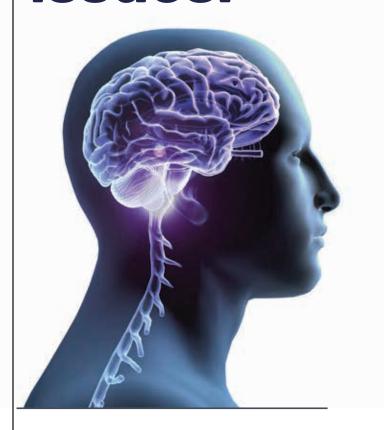


A lot has changed since 1969, and the time has come to modernize the Kaweah Health Medical Center to meet the modern healthcare needs of the growing Central Valley region. This is the next step on Kaweah Health's journey to world-class care. A new facility is what's best for our patients, staff, and community—and will serve us well for generations to come.

Learn More

For updated information on our master facility planning process and upcoming community engagement events, visit kaweahhealth.org/masterplan.

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woman is a powerful source of life. Not only does she bring new life into the world, but she is often considered the heart of her home and community—and the same is true of healthcare.

Women, who are key in maintaining healthy families, access healthcare more often than men, both for themselves and on behalf of their partners, parents, and children. In fact, according to NRC Health data that collects feedback from over 150,000 U.S. women annually, 78 percent of women surveyed consider themselves to be the primary healthcare decision-maker for their household.

Because women represent the cornerstone of a family's overall health, ensuring they have access to quality care can lead to improved health for children and families. And that is the focus of the women's healthcare team at Kaweah Health Exeter Clinic, where personalized, integrated care through prevention, wellness, and treatment is delivered to every woman.

"Our providers love what they do," shared Vanessa Glaze, nurse practitioner at the women's health clinic. "It is wonderful to work with people who really have a fire in their heart for their patients. Patients are enthusiastic about the care they receive and our providers are committed to solving their health problems."

This individualized care—led by OB/GYN physicians, Juan Sabogal, MD, and Talaksoon Khademi, DO—is sought after by patients throughout the region who sometimes travel from outside Tulare County just to be seen by our women's health specialists. Exeter Clinic, like all other Kaweah Health Clinics, is accessible to all patients, including those who are new, uninsured, or have Medi-Cal, effectively breaking down barriers that keep our vulnerable populations from getting the care they need.

Furthermore, as part of the Kaweah Health clinic network, the women's health team in Exeter provides an unmatched continuum of care by connecting patients to the larger, integrated Kaweah Health system, including award-winning services such as cardiac surgery, orthopedics, neurosurgery, pediatrics, and the medical center in Visalia, named one of the top 250 hospitals in the nation.

Women's health has traditionally been synonymous with obstetrics and gynecology, but the definition is expanded at Kaweah Health Exeter Clinic. Beyond reproductive care,

women are seen for their complex health needs across a comprehensive spectrum of specialties and life stages.

Dr. Sabogal echoed this point. "Our network of services and direct connection to the hospital expedites care for patients. We provide state-of-the-art obstetric and gynecological care, and can connect patients to other specialties according to their needs. We individualize care to make sure the patient gets the care she needs."

Vanessa agrees. "Our doctors do a brilliant job providing services to patients, including high-risk obstetrics. Our providers follow you through your entire pregnancy, which is not often the case at other clinics. We build relationships with our patients and produce good outcomes that keep patients coming back."

This full-spectrum healthcare is delivered in nine exam rooms, including two procedure rooms, in a modern facility opened in the fall of 2018. The comfortable clinic setting was designed with the patient experience in mind.

"It's a calm environment where patients don't feel lost in a crowd," shared Vanessa. "The serene atmosphere makes a difference for patients, and they are at the center of everything we do."

Aside from medical care, the clinic also houses team members from Kaweah Health Community Outreach who work diligently to link patients with additional resources, including food pantries, transportation, and support groups for healthier living.



No matter what resources they need, better healthcare for women is the clinic's first priority says Dr. Sabogal. "Our team has special training to make getting help easier for patients. We take care of their health and solve their issues."

Vanessa sums it up perfectly. "Good services provided to women lead to more services for families. We accept challenges and won't give up on you."



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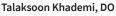
The serene atmosphere makes a difference for patients, and they are at the center of everything we do.

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Vanessa Glaze

Nurse practitioner at the women's health clinic







Juan Sabogal, MD

LEARN MORE

Health is our passion at Kaweah Health, and our clinic teams are proud to provide women and their families with excellent, affordable medical care that focuses on whole-person wellness in friendly clinics se to home.

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hen it was discovered, Omicron worried scientists.

The variant looked vastly different from previous versions of the coronavirus. It was also clear this new strain of the virus came with an advanced ability to elude our vaccines and spread quickly from person to person.

With the discovery of Omicron came the typical questions. What sets it apart from its predecessors? How severe are its symptoms? Is it more or less deadly than other variants?

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Omicron is highly contagious and highly transmissible and it's disabling workforces, not just ours, but everyone we rely on.

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Keri Noeske

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer at Kaweah Health

With infections at an all-time high in our community and across the U.S., the clinical picture reveals what other countries have already seen—a typical case of Omicron presents slightly differently and also likely carries a lower chance of getting seriously ill. However, vaccination is still critical when it comes to keeping our communities safe and hospitalization rates low.

As with any variant of coronavirus, the risk of infection depends on many factors, including whether you're vaccinated, received your booster shot, your age, and your overall health. The big danger with all coronavirus infections is that a "mild" illness will turn into a life-threatening one. Even if Omicron is less severe than the Delta variant, it is still hospitalizing people and causing deaths—and for people who are at high risk, such as older people or those with underlying health conditions, the chance of being hospitalized is still significant.

"Omicron is highly contagious and highly transmissible and it's disabling workforces, not just ours, but everyone we rely on," said Keri Noeske, Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer at Kaweah Health. "We're asking everyone – our community and our staff – to be careful out there. Please exercise good practices – wear masks, get fully vaccinated, wash your hands, and stay six feet apart from others. Anything we can do to prevent the spread in the community will help Valley hospitals with staffing."

The rate at which Omicron swiftly spread in the community in late December indeed impacted Kaweah Health's ability to staff its hospital. In just one week (December 27 - January 3), employees out on COVID-related leaves skyrocketed from 33 to 201, and the number continued to climb to an all-time high of 273 in mid-January. As of January 31, the positivity rate in Tulare County was 32.5 percent, which was more than double the state's positivity rate of 14.5 percent.

"Our health system has never stopped being impacted since the pandemic started," Noeske said noting that throughout the pandemic, many people delayed care and medical appointments and are now in need of hospitalization for more severe illnesses.

Of course, Kaweah Health is just one of a number of Central Valley hospitals currently struggling with staffing shortages as a result of Omicron's rapid spread in the community. Nationwide, the pandemic has also fueled the nursing shortage as the demand for nurses and bedside care has rapidly increased in step with hospitalizations.

Thankfully, the tools you can use to fight Omicron are the same tools we have been using since the start of the pandemic. Protect yourself and others by using good infection prevention practices and getting vaccinated, then boosted. Help us stop the spread of COVID-19 in all its forms. Your community hospital needs your urgent help.



Vaccines

Vaccines remain the best public health measure to protect people from COVID-19, slow transmission, and reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Masks

Masks offer protection against all variants. The CDC continues to recommend wearing a mask in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high community transmission, regardless of vaccination status.

Social Distance

Stay six feet away from others. Avoid close contact with people who are sick and remember some people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus.

Handwashing

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A Fighting Chance

Local boxing hero partners with Kaweah Health to educate the community about COVID-19 vaccination.

n the fall of 2021, Kaweah Health had the highest number of COVID-positive inpatients than any other medical center in the state of California. This was not a surprising statistic given the fact that the medical center serves a region with one of the lowest vaccination rates in the state. That's why Kaweah Health was proud to partner with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Super Heavyweight and Olympic Silver Medalist, Richard "Kiki" Torrez, Jr., to produce an educational marketing campaign promoting the benefits of vaccination.

"I'm an elite athlete so I'm really cautious about what I put in my body," shared Kiki. "I learned about the vaccine benefits and I learned about the risks of actually getting COVID. Once I started talking to actual doctors and people who knew what they were talking about, that really made a difference."

Kiki continued. "I'm not one that's going to say you have to take the vaccine. But I am saying get informed about it. I was really nervous about getting the vaccine at first but I got informed and made an educated decision to get the vaccine. Ultimately, getting vaccinated did give me a sense of security. The good outweighed the bad so I'm really happy I took it."

The pandemic has made a lasting impact on each of our lives. Vaccination is our chance to fight back and get our communities back on track. With Kiki's encouragement and willingness to share his story, Kaweah Health has a fighting chance at bringing hospitalization rates down and increasing vaccination rates in our region.

To that end, Kiki joined us in the fall of 2021 to host a free COVID-19 vaccine clinic and "meet and greet" event at Kaweah Health Tulare Clinic. The event was open to the public and included free COVID-19 vaccinations, an autograph session with Kiki, light refreshments, a custom boxing glove keychain giveaway, and music provided by local radio stations.

Additionally, Kiki tells his vaccination story in Kaweah Health television commercials, as well as in print advertisements, billboards, and social media—and now the campaign is getting national attention. In January 2022, Kaweah Health presented the final "Fight Back" marketing campaign to the HRSA, and 370 healthcare providers across the U.S. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and as a result, the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) decided to post the educational marketing piece on their national website as an example of a successful campaign.

No matter where he is featured, Kiki's message is the same: get educated about vaccination.

"I was really nervous about getting the vaccine at first but I got informed and made an educated decision...

Ultimately, getting vaccinated did give me a sense of security."

- Richard "Kiki" Torrez, Jr. Super Heavyweight boxer and Olympic Silver Medalist

"COVID affects so many people in so many different ways. You don't know if you're going to be the one on a respiratory system," Kiki stressed. "One of my favorite quotes is by Gandhi, 'live as if you were to die today and learn as if you were to live forever.' So get informed and make the right choice for you."

As of January 26, 2022, just 237,400 out of 480,000 Tulare County residents were fully vaccinated against COVID-19. That is only 49.3% of our total county population. We may still have a long way to go until our region is fully vaccinated but Kaweah Health has seen the positive impact partnering with Kiki has made on the community.

Don't let COVID knock you out. Get vaxxed and fight back!



How To Get Vaccinated

Safe, free, and effective COVID-19 vaccines are now available to everyone five years of age and up. Schedule your appointment at a Kaweah Health location online by visiting MyTurn.ca.gov. More information about vaccination can also be found at kaweahhealth.org/fightback.



That's why your family's health is at the heart of what we do at Kaweah Health Clinics. A healthy family is a happy family and we are proud to provide yours with excellent, affordable medical care in clinics close to home.

Your family deserves the best care, and you'll find it at Kaweah Health Clinics.

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Kaweah Health Woodlake Clinic

180 East Antelope Avenue, Woodlake, CA 93286 (559) 564-1800

Kaweah Health Exeter Clinic

1014 San Juan Avenue, Exeter, CA 93221 (559) 592-7300

Kaweah Health Tulare Clinic

1000 North Mooney Boulevard, Tulare, CA 93274 (559) 685-7100

Sequoia Health & Wellness Centers

202 West Willow Avenue, 5th Floor, Visalia, CA 93291 (559) 624-4820

For more information and hours of operations, please visit us online at kaweahhealth.org/clinics.





t was winter 2019, four days after Christmas, and Hans Gilkey was out enjoying a ride on a brand new electric scooter.

By his side on a scooter of her own was his long-time girlfriend, Kaylyn Hofstee. The air was crisp but the couple was feeling merry and full of life. As they zoomed down the road, Hans gained speed and scooted ahead. Moments later, the unimaginable happened. Hans fell, struck his head, and was immediately knocked unconscious. He wasn't wearing a helmet.

Kaylyn didn't know how serious his fall was until she reached Hans and noticed he wasn't breathing. A registered nurse working on the Kaweah Health cardiac unit at the time, Kaylyn quickly sprang into action to save Hans' life.

"My nurse instincts just kicked in and I began CPR," Kaylyn said. "Thank God I was trained to do that and knew how to handle the situation. I just acted. Thirty seconds to a minute later, I got a pulse and Hans started breathing."

The fun joyride turned into an urgent ambulance ride to Kaweah Health's emergency department. Upon arrival, the medical team rushed Hans to the operating room and immediately inserted a bolt—a small, hollow device placed through the skull into the space just between the skull and the brain—to monitor his intracranial pressure. Hans had suffered a traumatic head injury and the swelling in his brain was threatening his life. After a few agonizing hours of waiting, Kaylyn and Hans' families were told he was in stable but extremely critical condition and would be admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). It would be a full month before Hans would ever regain consciousness.

"His days in the ICU were tough. There were days when we couldn't even enter his room and could only look at him through a window," remembers Kaylyn. "As a nurse working for the hospital, I knew the kind of care we provided patients but it's a lot different to be on the other side. It was hard but we were blessed with the best nurses in the ICU who kept us in the loop and constantly relayed everything we needed to know to us. They went above and beyond to give us the best experience we could have."

Memories from those early, terrifying days after Hans' accident still remain, but the care and attention he received from the Kaweah Health medical team are what the family finds truly unforgettable—most especially the efforts of Charles Liu MD, a board-certified, Kaweah Health-affiliated neurosurgeon and professor of Clinical Neurological Surgery at USC (University of Southern California) Keck School of Medicine.

"Even though I worked at Kaweah Health, I had never met Dr. Liu or known of the neurosciences team we have to offer here. I didn't work on that unit," said Kaylyn. "Now I know that Kaweah Health has the neurosurgery team from USC here and there is always a neurosurgeon to provide care to our community. Dr. Liu was the best doctor Hans could have."

Kaylyn continued. "We were asked many times why we weren't transferring Hans out to receive care somewhere else, but we truthfully felt like we were getting the best care possible. The way Dr. Liu approached the situation, the way he talked to us and wouldn't leave a detail out in the day-to-day reports, helped us know everything going on with Hans' care. For the medical team to take the time to give us the information we needed on the journey is something we can never be grateful enough for."

And Hans would need a world-class team to survive. After trying various interventions to keep the swelling in Hans' brain down, including placing a drain in his skull, Dr. Liu decided it was time to perform a craniectomy, a type of neurosurgery done to remove a portion of the skull in order to relieve pressure on the brain caused by swelling. The skull is left open until the pressure goes down, at which point the opening is then closed. "That was kind of the last effort to save Hans' life," Kaylyn stated. "Dr. Liu performed the surgery and saved his life that day."

The critical surgery had indeed been life-saving, but Hans still had a long road to recovery ahead of him. A journey Dr. Liu is familiar with after years of experience, "People come into the

emergency room, I operate on them and save their lives, but what happens afterward is vital and just as important."

All in all, Hans spent just over a month in a medically-induced coma in the ICU. He was discharged from the hospital on January 31, 2020 with a breathing tube, feeding tube, and part of his skull removed—and spent the next six weeks recovering in an inpatient rehabilitation facility in northern California. To regain his strength and independence, Hans would need physical, occupational, and speech therapy to relearn the basic skills we take for granted, including how to eat, sit, walk, and talk. But Hans' determination to make a full recovery was evident from the start. After just one week in the rehabilitation facility, he learned to walk again.

Hans returned home in the spring of 2020 and began outpatient therapy treatment at the Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital in Visalia. With the help of his physical therapist, Courtney Williams, he gained more advanced mobility like jumping rope and skipping. Occupational therapy also played a huge role in Hans' recovery. This type of

therapy helps individuals regain basic activities of daily living and increases their independent living skills, such as eating, grooming, bathing, and dressing.

Kaylyn still marvels at the care Hans was provided. "The care he received through the outpatient therapy program, and the way his occupational therapist, Monica Bolton, invested in him and the relationship

they formed was pretty special. She went above and beyond for him," said Kaylyn. "Their relationship was very special and we are so thankful to have received such amazing care. Everyone at Kaweah Health became our family. They treated us better than we deserved."

Dr. Liu is just as fond of Hans, Kaylyn, and their families. "It is an absolute pleasure to have played a small role in Hans' recovery. Actually meeting him and seeing that he is okay is indeed special. I was delighted to take care of him. We got him through some extraordinary and very dark moments. Hans has made a terrific recovery."

Now Hans is back to doing activities he loves like playing golf, woodworking, and painting. Although the accident left him nonverbal for three months, the brain injury miraculously did not damage Hans' cognitive skills, so he is still able to do tasks such as think, read, learn, remember, reason, and pay attention the same as he did prior to the accident. Recovering his ability to speak has been a slower process than regaining his physical strength and basic living skills, but speech therapy is helping Hans improve his speaking abilities. It is just a matter of time and practice until Hans is completely verbal again.



OPPOSITE PAGE: HANS GILKEY AND KAYLYN HOFSTEE POSE FOR ENGAGEMENT PHOTOS IN 2021.

TOP: KAYLYN VISITS HANS IN THE ICU, WHERE HE SPENT ONE-MONTH IN A MEDICALLY-INDUCED COMA.

LEFT: HANS AND HIS FAMILY FINALLY REUNITE WITH DR. LIU IN THE FALL OF 2021.

December 2021 marked two years since Hans' accident, but the couple has been focused on another very special date—their wedding day, on January 22, 2022. Dr. Liu was, of course, invited.

Kaylyn is thankful for the expert care and the journey ahead. "There were days when I sat next to Hans' bed and I prayed that we had more life to live and this wasn't the end of our journey. God knew it wasn't, and in January, we get to start our official journey as 'Mr. and Mrs.'"

Hans wholeheartedly agrees. "I'm thankful to be alive. Thank you, Kaweah Health, for helping me."

□

EXPERT CARE YOU CAN COUNT ON

The Kaweah Health Neurosciences Center has nine board-certified neurosurgeons providing world-class care to patients in Central California.

We are proud to partner with neurosurgeons and professors of neurosurgery from the USC, Keck School of Medicine to offer neurosurgery and neurospine services in Visalia, treating patients with severe head injuries and neurosurgical conditions around the clock and close to home.

For more information on our Neurosciences Center, visit kaweahhealth.org/neuro.

The Difference A Gift Makes

A year in review for the Kaweah Health Foundation

nother year is history for the Kaweah Health Foundation. But what a year it was.

The Foundation kicked off the year by completing the Hope in Motion campaign, which supplied the funds for a SafeGait track-and-harness system that will help patients re-learn to walk at the Rehabilitation Hospital. Late in 2021, the system was installed and in late January we received state approval for physical therapists to start using it. It's the first SafeGait system in the state, and Kaweah Health recently learned that our 100-foot-long track is the largest in the United States. This new system means patients can get the care they need close to home.

Soon after, The Foundation had two big kick-offs: A name change to Kaweah Health Foundation, and the launch of the Modernization campaign, seeking \$1.9 million for support across Kaweah Health. While the campaign was planned to last more than a year, donations have already reached 90 percent of the goal, allowing for the purchase of many items, including:

- Ultrasound Bladder Scanners: This new tech will be used throughout the medical center to improve patient comfort.
- Halo Bassinets: With more than 4,500 babies born each year at Kaweah Health, the Mother/Baby unit really needed these 42 baby beds that swivel for easy reach for new, nursing moms.
- Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS): Kaweah Health gastroenterologists love this new machine, which helps them diagnose cancers earlier with crisp, clear images.
- New Generation Ventilators: Fifteen lightweight, quiet ventilators will allow freedom of movement for patients in long-term care.

But the year's story doesn't end there. A wonderful donor gifted the Foundation the funds needed to purchase a TrueBeam linear accelerator for the Brain Lab plus a top of the line CT scanner, and for Kaweah Health Hospice to take over operations of the Ruth Woods Open Arms House, which had closed, in 2021. This donor wishes to remain anonymous, but they have the Foundation's unending gratitude for helping with such critical upgrades that will serve our entire community.

TrueBeam delivers precise doses of radiation for cancer treatment with pinpoint accuracy during the 400-plus treatments performed each month. The CT scanner will be the third at Kaweah Health, used for biopsies as well as for trauma and stroke patients. With more than 3,000 scans done here every month, the new scanner will make a huge difference in wait times as well as accuracy.



TOP: THE ENDOSCOPY STAFF AT THE INSTALLATION OF THEIR NEW ENDOSCOPIC ULTRASOUND (EUS) IN 2021. LEFT: BLADDER SCANNER. RIGHT: A MOTHER USING A HALO BASSINET.

Grantors also love helping grow the organization. The California Health Facility Financing Authority granted more than \$2,000,000 for Kaweah Pediatric facilities, including \$1,000,000 toward construction of the Tulare Rural Clinic. Another \$300,000 went for child and neonatal cribs, an ultrasound, jaundice meters, lead analyzers, vision screeners and telemetry monitor, all geared for kids. The San Joaquin Valley Air District granted \$60,000 for electric vehicles for Security, and the Isnardi Foundation gave \$45,000 for Street Medicine, their second year giving to the program.

Finally, the Foundation has been able to support Kaweah Health medical teams with 23 grants for equipment, education, and programs requested by the departments that will use them, including Graduate Medical Education, Simulation Lab, and Kaweah Health Medical Group. Foundation grants totaled more than \$78,000.

What does 2022 have in store for the Foundation? The end of the Modernization Campaign by mid-year, if not sooner, and then a deep dive into a new one. The annual Golf Classic will take place once again in August, and the Heritage Club Dinner moves to April from its usual fall date. With help from our amazing community, anything is possible.

Visit kaweahhealth.org/foundation to learn more.



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Contact Kaweah Health today to learn about the benefits of knee replacement, and find out whether treatment is right for you.

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Keeping our patients safe from infection is a top priority. In addition to the top-notch doctors and leading-edge technology we are known for, we focus on the little details that also save lives: hand washing, strict hygiene rules, and comprehensive training. We aren't perfect, but we are committed to fighting for our patients every day. We congratulate our doctors, nurses, staff, and board for this recognition of our never ending quest for patient safety.

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is an elite designation from The Leapfrog Group, a national, independent watchdog that sets the highest standards for patient safety in the United States.



LEARN MORE: kaweahhealth.org