

Vital Signs



Vital Signs

SUMMER/FALL EDITION | 2021

LETTER FROM THE CEO

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KAWEAH HEALTH

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ON THE COVER:

LIKE A MARRIAGE VOW,
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TO CARE FOR YOU IN
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Many of us are ready for the pandemic to be over, but we cannot ignore that COVID-19 numbers are on the rise in all 50 states with the Delta variant spreading in areas with low vaccination rates. Unfortunately, that includes Tulare County. As a healthcare organization, we encourage everyone to carefully consider getting a vaccination. Those who are unvaccinated are at much higher risk of getting COVID-19 and far more likely to suffer severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Vaccinations may also be best for our local economy. We can all agree that the pandemic was devastating to local business. To end up there again would be deeply disappointing. It may be our best defense to avoid another shutdown so that this can be a season of recovery for local business.

At Kaweah Health, we are not only preparing for the immediate future when it comes to caring for our community, we are also looking long-term through our master facility planning process. We are currently seeking feedback from our community on two options to solve one of our immediate needs – a newer, more modern hospital wing to replace our 1969 building, which houses 206 of Kaweah Health Medical Center's 435 inpatient hospital beds on our downtown campus. California regulations (SB1953) restrict us from using these beds for acute level patient care after 2030 because they do not meet State earthquake standards. While it was state-of-the-art when built in 1969, the same year the U.S. went to the moon, a lot has changed since then. Healthcare has dramatically changed, but the 1969 building has not. Our patients and visitors repeatedly tell us that it no longer meets their needs.

Since 2016, we've worked closely with experts and community members to determine whether we can bring the 1969 building into compliance with earthquake standards. We have carefully researched a number of options, but they are too costly and impractical. For example, it would cost up to \$300 million to retrofit the Mineral King Wing. If that were to occur, during construction, the building would be closed for months or years, severely reducing our capacity to care for our community. It would also fail to address the need for more rooms. Retrofitting the building does not appear to be a viable option, although we continue to evaluate it.

It is almost certain we will need to replace the Mineral King Wing to modernize and replace the existing 206 patient beds, to expand access, and to add an additional 34 private patient rooms. With cost and efficiency in mind, we are hoping to preserve funds by working to complete this construction project in a more affordable, two-phased approach to meet our community's growing needs.

Back in 2018, RBB Architects was unanimously selected in an open and transparent public bidding process for its proven track record of building lower-cost hospitals that are highly efficient to operate. Their first option would be to build two 120-bed towers, opening the first tower by 2030 and the second tower by 2040. Their second option would be to build one nine-story tower with five completed floors including 120 beds, dietary, and pharmacy by 2030; and infilling

CONTINUED ON PG 5



GARY HERBST
Chief Executive Officer
of Kaweah Health

KAWEAH HEALTH

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A Modern Hospital for Modern Times

The Modernization Plan is a \$1.8 million dollar campaign to “modernize” our community hospital’s facilities.

As one of America's Top 250 hospitals in the nation, Kaweah Health continues to receive national recognition for its excellence in providing high-quality medical services and patient-centered care to our patients. As the demand for healthcare services increases, our need to expand and improve our hospital increases. Recently, the Kaweah Health Foundation Board of Directors voted to prioritize raising funds for state-of-the-art equipment, as directed by our frontline medical team. Monies raised through June 2022 will go toward a Modernization Plan, to expand and make necessary improvements to our hospital.

The Foundation seeks monetary contributions to support ongoing patient-centered care at Kaweah Health, including specialized care for the 4,500 babies delivered per year and high-quality medical treatment for our seriously ill patients battling digestive (gastrointestinal) and lung diseases.

Included in the campaign are new HALO bassinets, designed to meet the needs of all new mothers and keep a baby within arm’s reach without the need to twist or stretch. For our medical-surgical units, the campaign will be obtaining Sonosite Ultrasound, portable ultrasound systems that offer wide views and bedside use.

Also included in the Modernization Campaign is an endoscopic ultrasound (EUS), which physicians use to perform minimally invasive procedures examining organs and other structures that cannot be seen through standard endoscopy procedures. Having this equipment will allow physicians to provide better care for our patients. Funds raised by the Foundation will also provide new and improved ventilators to help modernize our subacute care facility on South Court Street.

Finally, to support the completion of the emergency department expansion, the Mineral King lobby will be renovated to once again offer coffee, food service, a gift shop, and seating area needed to supplement service to our patients, visitors, and staff, providing a serene and comfortable space to wait or take a break.

Every dollar counts and our community can rest assured that all contributions go directly to support the patient-centered Modernization Plan. Not one cent goes to administration, payroll, or overhead costs to operate the Foundation office.

Over the past 30 years, Kaweah Health employees have donated millions of dollars to support the mission and vision of the Foundation. Each of the aforementioned projects

brings us one step closer to becoming a world-class healthcare provider for our community.

Moreover, the Foundation raises money year-round for special projects, including:

- Comfort items not covered by insurance for cancer patients like wigs, compression garments, bras, head coverings, and free mammograms.
- Funding for Street Medicine non reimbursable medical expenses – vans, gasoline, prescriptions, medical supplies and street medicine coordinator
- Medical technology and equipment for patients
- Kaweah Health’s journey to world-class

ABOVE: INCLUDED IN KAWEAH HEALTH FOUNDATION’S MODERNIZATION CAMPAIGN ARE NEW HALO BASSINETS (NOT PICTURED), KEEPING BABIES WITHIN ARM’S REACH OF THEIR MOTHERS.

EVERY GIFT COUNTS

To donate or learn more about the Modernization Campaign, contact the Foundation office at (559) 624-2359 or visit us online at kaweahhealth.org/give.

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

the remaining four floors (adding 120 beds) by 2040. Soon, we will be inviting you to review the two options developed by RBB. We look forward to your feedback. Whichever option is ultimately selected, we know the health of our community largely depends on access to high quality, world-class care. Kaweah Health’s vision is to be your world-class healthcare choice, for life.



RN

INTERVIEW EVENT

Thursday, November 11

Check KaweahHealth.org/Careers for up-to-date information on location and interview format

Questions?

Karen Brooks-Harvey, Nurse Recruiter

kbrooks@kaweahhealth.org

Phone: (559) 624-5251 Text: (559) 785-0373

The Ultimate Ultrasound

Doctors do not have x-ray vision, but inside Kaweah Health's Emergency Department where minutes matter, they have the next best thing. It's a hand-held ultrasound machine doctors take to a patients' bedside so they can "see" what's wrong with their patients, and begin treating them, faster than they can get a CT or test results to confirm a diagnosis.

"It makes patient care better because we can get the correct diagnosis often in a fraction of the time," said Dr. John Hipskind, an emergency medicine physician and Medical Director of Ultrasound at Kaweah Health. "In the Emergency Department (ED), we need to know, 'Is this life threatening or is it something else?' Using ultrasound, there have been cases where within a minute of a trauma activation, I knew immediately without waiting for blood tests or CT scans that the patient had to go to the operating room."

Point of care ultrasound, also known as PoCUS, is just one of the ways that Kaweah Health has invested in technology to improve quality of care for patients. Last year, Kaweah Health became the first hospital in the world to debut a new, innovative software system, the FUJIFILM Sonosite Synchronicity™, to support the use of point of care ultrasound in the ED. The new system benefits patients by allowing doctors an ultrasound they have performed at the bedside into a patient's medical record so imaging doesn't have to be repeated. The new system also allows doctors and the healthcare team to immediately share information about their patients who need help.

"If we see a patient come into the Emergency Department with chest pain and shortness of breath, we can do a good cardiac exam in three minutes," Dr. Hipskind said. "If we saw there was fluid surrounding the patient's heart that needed to be removed, we could put the ultrasound in the medical record and the cardiovascular surgeon and anesthesiologist could log in, see the images, agree, and get ready in the operating room."

Because Synchronicity™ has a shallow learning curve, Kaweah Health resident physicians can do ultrasounds with minimal assistance. The study becomes part of the patient's chart, but Kaweah Health can also use the information to count to credential physicians and remain in good standing as an accredited trauma center.

The use of PoCUS in the Emergency Department has also led to the development of Kaweah Health's new emergency ultrasound fellowship. Established in 2020, the one-year fellowship is for physicians who want to take a deeper dive into ultrasound and its benefits. The program is one of only four Clinical Ultrasound Accredited Programs in California by

the American College of Emergency Physicians and has already garnered applicants from across the nation.

"There's this strong commitment in the fellowship to fully immerse yourself in point of care ultrasound. These fellows are more skilled at ultrasound, which benefits patients and allows them to teach others and contribute to more research," Dr. Hipskind said. In 2020, Dr. Matthew Henschel, the program's fellow, studied the use of PoCUS to diagnose COVID-19 and how it compared to point of care swabs.

"It's been a labor of love, really, into that arena of medicine where we can really improve the quality of patient care," Dr. Hipskind said.

KAWEAH HEALTH'S NEW EMERGENCY ULTRASOUND FELLOWSHIP ALLOWS PHYSICIANS TO FULLY IMMERSE THEMSELVES IN POINT OF CARE ULTRASOUND, BENEFITTING PATIENTS.

L TO R: JOHN HIPSKIND, MD, MATTHEW HENSCHEL, DO, TYLER MITCHELL, DO, NOLAN PAGE, DO, JAMES SIDNEY, DO.

What's New

Here are two of the newest pieces of technology that Kaweah Health is using to provide world-class care to the community.

Endoscopic Ultrasound

Kaweah Health is now home to the Hitachi Arietta 850, the top of the line endoscopic ultrasound platform, helping doctors diagnose abdominal or chest pain. With this piece of technology, physicians get clearer and very detailed images of subtle lesions in the pancreas or liver to ensure the right diagnosis and course of treatment.

The ROSA® knee system

This fall, Kaweah Health welcomes the ROSA Knee System, which offers a surgical procedure that is similar to traditional total knee replacement, but with a robotic assistant. Surgeons use the ROSA for a minimally-invasive approach that offers the following benefits:

- Smaller incisions with reduced scarring and minimal blood loss
- Less post-operative pain
- Shorter hospital stay and recovery period
- Quicker return to daily activities
- Lower incidence of complications
- Precise placement of the implant
- Reduced injury to adjacent tissues
- Increased longevity of the implant





In Sickness and Health: Kaweah Health Renews Its Commitment to Our Community

When Kaweah Health began treating patients 60 years ago, the healthcare provider made a commitment to transform care in this region. Over the years, it has served our communities through education, research, and patient care – and over time, has expanded to become one of Central California’s best integrated health systems, leading others by enhancing what is and passionately pursuing what can be.

Since its founding, Kaweah Health has grown exponentially from its beginnings as a 68-bed community hospital to a healthcare system and enterprise with eight campuses across Tulare and Kings Counties, anchored by a 435-bed acute medical center located in downtown Visalia. With a 54-bed long-term care hospital on Court Street, a 61-bed acute and skilled rehabilitation hospital, and a 63-bed acute psychiatric facility on Akers Street, its combined 613 licensed inpatient beds make Kaweah Health the largest district hospital in the State of California.

But Kaweah Health is now much more than a hospital or medical center. It has become a comprehensive, technology-rich, integrated health system with numerous outpatient clinics and urgent care centers;

hospice and home health; home infusion therapy; dialysis and cancer care; therapies and wound care; mental health; cardiac surgery; neurosurgery; vascular surgery; trauma; and many other essential health services.

Furthermore, in 2013, Kaweah Health began its Graduate Medical Education (GME) Program, becoming a teaching hospital for resident physicians from across the world training in emergency medicine, family medicine, psychiatry, surgery, anesthesiology, and transitional year. This year, Kaweah Health will add a child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship to its program. The first class of physicians graduated in June 2016, and since the program’s inception, Kaweah Health has graduated 118 resident physicians—45 percent of which have remained in the Central Valley to practice medicine.

Kaweah Health’s transformative drive inspired the team to rethink how they want their story told, and how their previous name, Kaweah Delta, impacted their purpose in the community. “Roughly ten years ago, we looked around us and watched as well-known hospitals and health systems began to change their

names,” said Kaweah Health Chief Executive Officer Gary Herbst. “The names that emerged were shorter and simpler but more powerful, more recognizable, and more reflective of the health systems’ broadening offering of services and their changing role in their communities. These hospitals rebranded themselves, in part, to reflect the evolving role of hospitals from healers of sickness and injury to champions of health and wellness.”

While Kaweah Health has been pondering a rebrand for the last ten years or so, the idea became more focused two years ago when the health system adopted a new mission and vision statement and enhanced their foundational pillars to better reflect its commitment, passion, and reason for our existence.

“A couple years ago during our annual strategic planning process, we engaged our employees, medical staff, Board of Directors, and members of the community to review our organization’s Mission and Vision statements,” shared Marc Mertz, Kaweah Health Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer. “It was during that process the group said the name Kaweah Delta and our branding no longer reflected who we

had become. Participants felt the name Kaweah Health paid homage to our history, but better reflected that we were no longer just a hospital that treats the ill and wounded, but we are a health system committed to improving the health of our community.”

Then, shortly before the brand launch in the spring of 2020, the pandemic arrived and delayed rebranding plans by more than a year. “We thought long and

“Passion is described as a strong liking or desire. For myself, I can say I have a strong liking for the obstacles I’ve overcome, the chances I’ve taken to pursue my dreams, and a desire to see what Kaweah Health has to offer me and my future. Being a nurse isn’t my work, it’s my passion.”

- Kristy Mackey, Emergency Department

hard about launching a new brand during the COVID pandemic,” said Mertz, “but we felt it highlighted and celebrated the amazing commitment, compassion, and dedication our teams showed during the last 18 months.”

On May 1, 2021, Kaweah Health was finally introduced to the world, and Herbst is confident in the continued success of the health system.

“We continue to expand our regional reach, partnerships, and affiliations with leaders in healthcare, such as the Cleveland Clinic, Valley Children’s Hospital, and the University of Southern California,” said Herbst, “and the rebranding changes are necessary to clearly identify us as a unified, unique, regional entity and California healthcare system. This is what will allow us to give pay raises, offer great benefits, fund our retirement plans, and allow us to continue to invest in new services, new technologies, new facilities, and recruit and retain the best and brightest employees and providers.”

New facilities include the newly constructed and vastly expanded emergency department that opened August 18 of this year. The Kaweah Health emergency department is one of the busiest in California, caring for approximately 90,000 patients each year in an older facility that was originally designed to support the treatment of only 72,000 patients a year. The lack of space and patient beds was a growing problem for Kaweah Health, especially considering the medical center is the only trauma center between Fresno and Bakersfield,



PICTURED: KAWEAH HEALTH REBRANDED IN MAY 2021, AND THE POSITIVE IMPACTS WILL BE FELT IN OUR COMMUNITY FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

and one of only three emergency departments serving nearly 500,000 residents in Tulare County. The modern design and spacious layout of the new emergency department increases patient beds from 41 to 74 and more than doubles the size of the waiting area to provide 100+ patients and their families with a larger, more comfortable environment.

Kaweah Health is also making primary care easier to access for local residents by opening a new multispecialty health clinic in the city of Tulare. “We constantly assess our community’s healthcare needs,”

can only come from growth where Kaweah Health is viewed and trusted by our community and service area as the provider of choice. The first line of our mission statement now reads: Health is our Passion – not healthcare but ‘health,’ like a marriage vow that promises to take care of you in both sickness and health. That is our promise to our community.”

Frequently Asked Questions

“I have been blessed to be a part of this hospital system since 1979. I know it sounds corny, but this is MY hospital. I am proud to be a part of this healthcare system and am amazed at what we have been able to accomplish. From our cardiac surgery, neonatal care, trauma capabilities with helipad, brain surgery, rehabilitation care, a robust medical residency program, and so much more, we are able to keep patients near their family support systems and homes. I am thankful for the commitment to excellence that makes me proud to say this is MY hospital and I am Kaweah Health.”

- Kathy Wittman, Infection Prevention

said Mertz. “The Central Valley is very underserved when it comes to healthcare. If there is an unmet need that we know we can fill with outstanding care, we are going to try to bring that service to the community.”

Herbst agrees. “The pandemic has been tough for every health system, including ours. We need to rebuild our financial reserves and our performance, and that

I’ve been hearing that this is a “branding effort.” What is a brand?

A brand is what a person thinks of or feels about a product, place, service, person, or organization. A brand encompasses everything the public thinks about your offering – both factual (e.g. our colors are blue and orange) and emotional (e.g. our staff are heroes). It is bigger than a name or a logo or a single hospital; it is the collective feeling we have about those things based on our direct experiences with them. A brand is the sum total of everything people think and feel about who we are and the service we provide.

Why was a new brand needed?

Modernizing our brand is necessary to:

- Unite and represent the entirety of our service lines, programs, and locations under a common name, logo, and brand
- Clearly identify us as a unified, unique, regional entity and California healthcare system
- Enable consistency in messaging and education, making navigating our healthcare system easier for our patients, team, and community

Why do I keep reading “Live with passion” in the brand messages?

The “Live with passion” theme was inspired by the first line in our mission statement: health is our passion. We know excellent healthcare has the power to heal, but it is our passion for people that inspires wellness and changes lives for the better. When people come to our facilities and connect with our healthcare team, we want them to experience the truth of our mission and values in every interaction they have with us. We want them to know we are dedicated to more than medicine. Whether they are inside or outside the walls of our facilities, we are dedicated to each person’s whole-person wellness and passionate pursuit of a life lived well – a life lived with passion.

Why is the name change necessary?

The world around us is rapidly changing, and to make a difference, we have to be different. We are not the same organization we were 60, 30, or even 10 years ago, and as we continue on our journey to becoming a world-class healthcare provider, we will focus more on health, not just healthcare. We are modernizing our brand and changing our name to show the world that we are innovative, confident, compassionate, and progressive – and as a symbol of who we are today, Kaweah Delta has evolved to become Kaweah Health.

When will the signage change at Kaweah Health locations?

The sign transition will happen over time in order to ensure we are living up to our value of stewardship. Some service areas have already begun making the transition; others are scheduled to do so. Sign installation began on April 27 at our downtown Visalia campus. Installation dates vary by location and are scheduled through the end of 2021.

WE ARE HIRING!



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When Care Matters Most

Kaweah Health Hospice offers families dignity and comfort as they walk through end-of-life care for a loved one

For more than 35 years, Kaweah Health Hospice has been providing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual support to terminally ill patients and their families.

In 2020, Kaweah Health recruited Ryan Howard, MD, to serve as the medical director of Kaweah Health Hospice and Palliative Medicine Services. Dr. Howard, Tulare County's only fellowship-trained physician in hospice care, has a specific philosophy when it comes to caring for patients.

"Working to aggressively control previously unmanageable symptoms and providing empathetic and compassionate care to folks nearing the end of their lives is just what I felt called to do," said Dr. Howard. "I wake up and go to work every day just hoping to make a positive impact on the lives of my patients and their families."

It was through his own personal experience with his grandfather that influenced his decision to pursue additional training in palliative care. Suffering from heart disease, his grandfather decided to utilize hospice services seven months prior to his death. Dr. Howard recalls how he had such a better quality of life receiving care in the comfort of his own home. Dr. Howard is passionate about delivering the message that hospice is not about dying, it is about living your best life as long as you can with the help of a supportive team.

"We as a team at Kaweah Health Hospice are so immensely honored to care for our community" said Dr. Howard.

Loved ones of chronically ill patients share with Dr. Howard that they are not ready to give up, and he replies, "neither am I... I want to keep fighting." Dr. Howard says it is reasonable to make adjustments based on what the individual is fighting for and creating attainable goals as patients' conditions change.

"To say we are doing anything other than continuing the fight would be almost offensive toward this person who has been fighting their whole life," said Dr. Howard. "They are always going to fight, but at a decided point, the fight is for more comfort, quality of life, and maintaining their dignity."

"Hospice care can lead to a better quality of life. The number one thing we hear from families is, 'Gosh, I wish we had done this sooner.'"

According to an annual survey conducted by U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Kaweah Health Hospice exceeded the national average and is the highest rated hospice in the area when it comes to communicating with families, getting timely help, help for pain and symptoms, and training family to care for their loved one.

For more information on how not all hospices are the same, visit hospicecompare.org to review their findings and see how Kaweah Health stands apart.

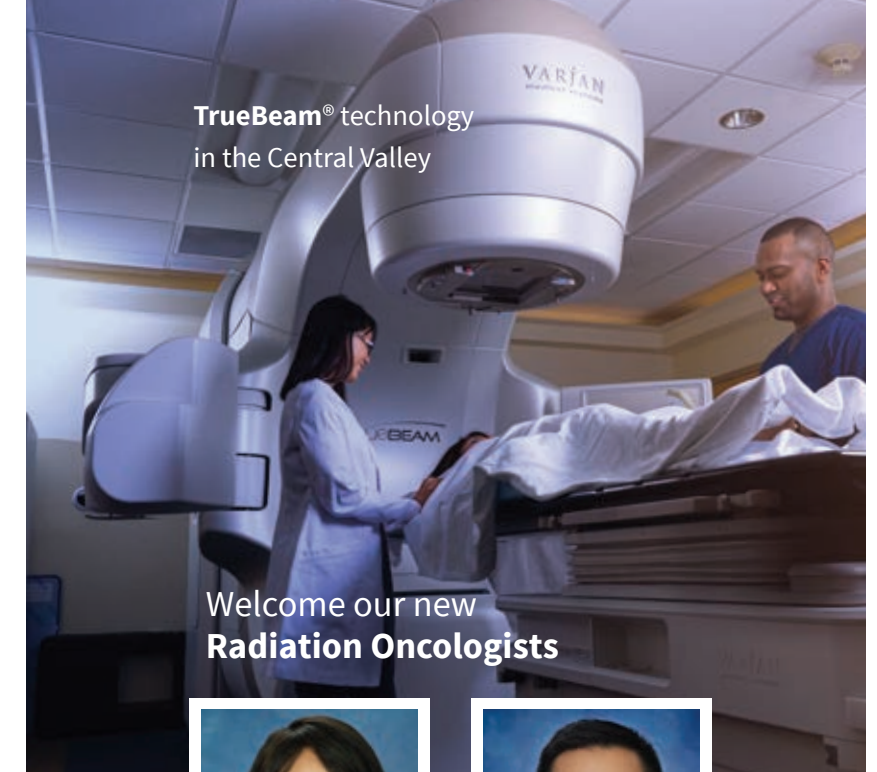


"The number one thing we hear from families is... I wish we had done this sooner."

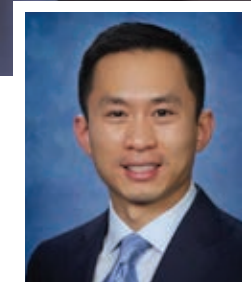
- Ryan Howard, MD

ABOVE: KAWEAH HEALTH'S HOSPICE AND DR. RYAN HOWARD PROVIDE EMPATHETIC AND COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR FOLKS NEARING THE END OF THEIR LIVES.

TrueBeam® technology
in the Central Valley



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LOCATIONS IN VISALIA AND HANFORD



Radiation Oncology - A division of Kaweah Health

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A Stroke of Life

The fear is real – that one day, as the spouse of a police officer, there will be a call saying the worst has happened.

Naomi Kent got that a call from her son on April 21, 2021. Naomi was on a jog, while her husband Jason, 42, a sergeant with the Dinuba Police Department, was wrapping up his graveyard shift in Dinuba.

“My first question was, ‘Did daddy get shot? He didn’t say anything,’” she said. “I asked, ‘Is daddy alive?’ He said, ‘Yes.’”

At that moment, Sgt. Kent was en route to Kaweah Health Medical Center by ambulance. He had been doing paperwork at the police station, but when he sat up after bending down, something went wrong. He was dizzy and his vision was impaired.

“It was just a feeling I had never felt before. I started praying, but after maybe 20-30 seconds, it got worse. I recognized I needed help,” he said.

Sgt. Kent reached for the phone, but couldn’t dial. He was able to use his police radio to call paramedics for help. “From there, I was in and out of consciousness,” he said.

That day, Sgt. Kent became one of the 795,000 people each year who have a stroke in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. When people in Tulare and Kings Counties have a stroke, they are taken to Kaweah Health, an Advanced Primary Stroke Center and one of America’s 100 Best Hospitals for Stroke Care™ in 2021, according to Healthgrades. Stroke patients have a 39.1% lower risk of dying if treated at hospitals that received the America’s 100 Best Hospitals for Stroke Care™, like Kaweah Health, versus non-recipient hospitals, according to cahealth.org.

Dr. Sean Oldroyd, Medical Director of Kaweah Health’s Stroke Program, said the Kaweah Health team works around the clock to improve the quality of care for stroke patients, like Sgt. Kent. “We are focused on providing the best care possible and saving lives. It is all about the patient, so we are doing everything we can do for them,” he said.

Back at Kaweah Health, the team was doing everything possible for Sgt. Kent, who was experiencing paralysis on his left side. Dr. Rachelle Yellin was on the phone with Naomi asking for



permission, which she gave, to administer a drug to her husband that could break up the clot blocking the flow of blood to her husband’s brain. She also prepared Naomi for who she was about to see at the hospital – a man that looked very different from her husband of 20 years.

Ten minutes later, Sgt. Kent could speak. Three days later, he left Kaweah Health fully recovered. Sgt. Kent remains on medical leave, however, as doctors try to determine what caused his stroke.

“If you would have asked me the top 10 things that may happen to me in law enforcement, I would have never thought a stroke,” Sgt. Kent said. “I try to stay healthy and active with my children and wife outdoors, so I would have never thought of a stroke ever.”

Jason and Naomi Kent cannot say enough about the Kaweah Health team – from the doctors to the nurses to everyone in between.

“We felt loved and cared for when we were there,” Naomi said. “I’m very grateful for those doctors and nurses because they were really thorough. The whole team did so much to take care of him.”

The whole experience, though, has changed Sgt. Kent’s perspective on life. While he was at peace as the stroke was happening, he now realizes April 21, 2021 could have ended differently. “I really have come to appreciate and be thankful for how short life is,” he said. “I have a great appreciation for life and this has been a great reminder to enjoy time with friends and family and our time here on Earth.”

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Watch Sgt. Kent tell his story in his own words at kaweahhealth.org/stroke.



ABOVE: SGT. JASON KENT, NOW FULLY RECOVERED, AND HIS FAMILY ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE CARE HE RECEIVED AT KAWEAH HEALTH.

KNOW THE SIGNS

To spot stroke signs, people should refer to the letters in “**FAST**” and know when to call 9-1-1:

- F**ace Drooping
- A**rm Weakness
- S**peech Difficulty
- T**ime to Call 911

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The Pimentels' Passion

The Pimentels are part of a passionate team with a set of shared beliefs that fuels the Kaweah Health care of today.

Thirty-five years ago, Angie Pimentel watched the team at Kaweah Health save her son's life. It lit a fire in her to serve others.

"I was just amazed. It made me want to make that same commitment and do that for someone else," she said.

Today, Angie is a Registered Nurse and one of the first faces you see after surgery at Kaweah Health. She's been a part of the Kaweah Health team for 33 years wearing her heart and her passion on her sleeve and inspiring a generation along the way. That includes her son Charles, whose team sterilizes and processes surgical equipment at Kaweah Health, and her daughter Samantha, whose team gets much needed medical supplies and equipment to patient care units throughout the healthcare organization.

"We care. We really do. We're part of a team providing care for people who need help," Samantha said. "This is something that I wake up and want to do each and every day."

The work that the Pimentels do each day at Kaweah Health is more than just a job. Each have careers that are personally satisfying, but support their families as well.

"My work has given me not only professional stability, but financial stability for my family. I was a mother of four children," Angie said.

Samantha is also a mother to a two-year-old son and while he's not quite old enough to understand that his mom helps people, she has watched her nieces fall in love with their grandmother's profession.

"My nieces look at their grandma and they think she is a hero," Samantha said. "They would love to do what she does one day. I wanted to be a nurse like my mom, but then I saw that there were so many other paths. Kaweah Health is more than just doctors and nurses."

The Pimentels like many of the 5,000 other team members who work at Kaweah Health, are more than employees, they have been patients at Kaweah Health as well. It's an experience that helps reinforce the importance of providing excellent and passionate health care to this community.

"I'm more than just an employee here. I'm also a patient. I'm also a spouse of a patient. I have children who have utilized our organization also for their healthcare needs," she said.

"We care. We really do. We're part of a team providing care for people who need help," Samantha said. "This is something that I wake up and want to do each and every day."

- Samantha Pimentel

LEFT: ANGIE PIMENTEL, RN, SON CHARLES, AND DAUGHTER SAMANTHA ARE PART OF A 5,000 PLUS TEAM AT KAWEAH HEALTH WHO WORK PASSIONATELY AND COMPASSIONATELY EVERY DAY.

Samantha's had knee surgeries, back surgery and her son at Kaweah Health.

"Kaweah Health has been amazing and provided me with such amazing care," she said.

Angie says she is extremely grateful to work beside her daughter and son and knows their story is not unique. It's not uncommon to hear that family members are employed at Kaweah Health.

"I still get excited when I see them in the cafeteria. It's fun to see Charles and Samantha at work and know that I was part of their decision to work for this organization," she said. "My children know how passionate I've been with my second family, which is my work family. They have adapted to that and made this their second family, too."

Graduate Medical Education: Addressing the Doctor Shortage



What is Graduate Medical Education (GME)

All medical school graduates must complete a period of residency training, to be licensed to practice medicine in the United States. GME comprises the second phase — after medical school — of the formal education that prepares doctors for medical practice. During residency, doctors learn skills and techniques specific to their chosen specialty under the supervision of attending physicians and serve as part of a care team.

A closer look at Kaweah Health's role in addressing the physician shortage in the Central Valley

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a physical, mental, and economic impact on our nation and our underserved communities were hit the hardest in terms of need, access, and the availability of health services. The pandemic influenced our entire lives and worsened the nation's doctor shortage.

Even before the pandemic, Kaweah Health was working to improve access to health care and address the physician shortage. In 2010, Kaweah Health set in place a long-term investment in Graduate Medical Education (GME) to build a physician workforce able to meet the future health care needs of our community.

"Kaweah Health continues to focus on its newest pillar, empower through education," said Lori D. Winston, MD, FACEP, Vice President of Medical Education, Designated Institutional Official at Kaweah Health. "In the Central Valley, the shortage is real and when COVID hit, it shined a spotlight on already profound inequities in health care access."

A 2017 study by the California Future Health Workforce Commission, estimated a 10,500-clinician shortfall by 2030. Equally troubling is the projected shortage of specialists, leaving patients with heart failure, strokes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, debilitating arthritis, and other ailments without direct access to essential care.

"It takes resources," said Dr. Winston about why there are not more hospital-based training programs. "Building a residency program is a multipronged approach; it is a physician-led initiative that requires a local champion. Kaweah Health is that champion."

Kaweah Health's GME program was created to train physicians through high quality, evidence based, multi-disciplinary care while advocating for patient education and access to healthcare for patients of all backgrounds and economic statuses.

"We have retained 45 percent of the physicians within our program and we could not be happier with that statistic," said Dr. Winston. "Our community can be very proud to know that teaching hospitals, like Kaweah Health Medical Center have better mortality rates than hospitals that do not have an education program."

Having residents in training raises the quality of care. For the community, an education environment means the latest and greatest in medicine, which is ever-changing as new science, treatments, and services become available.

The word doctor is derived from the Latin verb "docere," meaning to teach, and Dr. Winston has observed how

doctors who teach are more fulfilled. In fact, when new physicians are looking for job opportunities, they almost always choose a teaching hospital like Kaweah Health Medical Center over a hospital without medical education programs. "[Doctors] want to be part of our residency programs," said Dr. Winston. "They like working with residents."

Kaweah Health's six GME programs will support the training of 130 resident physicians during the upcoming academic year. Among them is the next class of 48 new resident physicians who started this past June. Since its inception, Kaweah Health has graduated 118 resident physicians, 45 percent of which have remained in the Central Valley to practice medicine.

In August, Kaweah Health welcomed back Dr. Kyle Ota, M.D. as the first colorectal surgeon in Tulare County. Dr. Ota graduated from Kaweah Health's Graduate Medical Education Surgery Residency Program in 2020. After completing his fellowship in colorectal surgery, Dr. Ota's returned to the Central Valley.

LEFT: DR. LORI WINSTON, VICE PRESIDENT OF MEDICAL EDUCATION, DESIGNATED INSTITUTIONAL OFFICIAL AT KAWEAH HEALTH, IS FLANKED BY RESIDENT DOCTORS LEARNING SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES OF THEIR SPECIALTY.

Kaweah Health's Graduate Medical Education Program began in 2013, and now offers residency programs in emergency medicine, family medicine, psychiatry, surgery, anesthesiology, and transitional year. The first class of physicians graduated in June 2016.

Since its inception, Kaweah Health has graduated 118 resident physicians, 45 percent of which have remained in the Central Valley to practice medicine.





Kaweah Health Medical Group: Honoring the Past, Looking Toward the Future

The year was 1940, a time famous for the Dunkirk evacuation, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's third presidential victory, and the first appearance of Captain America in the comics. But closer to home in Visalia, it was also the year a medical partnership was formed between I.M. Lipson, MD and his son-in-law, William S. Neal, MD, followed shortly with the addition of J.H. Brady, MD. Then the country and these doctors joined the fight in World War II – but came home and began the practice again.

That partnership became the Visalia Medical Clinic, and now, nearly 80 years later, Kaweah Health Medical Group (KHMG). The new name was announced in May 2021, along with the rebranding of the Kaweah Delta Health Care District becoming Kaweah Health.

The change is a new beginning for KHMG, a rebirth that takes the best of the old and makes for something even better. “We are doing this because we are creating a health system,” said Benjamin Brennan, MD, a Family Medicine physician at KHMG. “We want the people in Visalia, Tulare County, and the surrounding areas to understand that we are united (with Kaweah Health).”

“We are here for a common goal: To provide the best healthcare for the people in the community.”

That’s been the goal since the start, even as the staff and locations changed. In the beginning, the clinic was located on South Floral Avenue, where the Kaweah Health Medical Center is today. In fact, it’s thought that the clinic was in the exact spot where surgery is now located in the main hospital. But the clinic grew fast, and made its first move in 1957, to Meadow Avenue, right across from College of the Sequoias. Despite the new digs, that office wasn’t really big enough either, with one little, cramped office dubbed the “Dog House” for its lack of space.

So in 1971, the search was on for a new site where a new, larger clinic could be built. After a year of searching, the Hillsdale Avenue location was chosen, as land that far west was much cheaper than being in the center of town.

Still, when the new site opened in 1974, a walnut orchard was across the street, and some clients complained about the location being too far away. Hard to believe today, with hotels, restaurants and the Post Office all in the vicinity!

Back then an office visit cost around \$10, and patient files were physical, and often hard to locate if several doctors had the same patient. Computers came in the 1990s, making some of the long-time doctors a wee bit uncomfortable at first. Lots of other new technology such as digital x-rays (remember developing film?) have been purchased over the years, too, putting the clinic on the cutting edge of patient care and attracting the most talented physicians to the practice.

And perhaps the biggest change came just a few years ago, in 2015, when the clinic partnered with Kaweah Health to form Kaweah Health Medical Group. The partnership helps attract the highest caliber physicians, Brennan said, in part because the location offers so many services under one roof.

Bruce Hall, MD, now the KHMG Medical Director, joined the clinic in 2000 from a practice in Lindsay because he wanted to be closer to the hospital in Visalia for his internal medicine patients. He chose KHMG because “it’s always been a top-notch organization, with great quality and patient care.” He and other leaders saw the benefits of affiliating with Kaweah Health, especially when it came to getting the latest equipment and attracting the best physicians. At the same time, Kaweah Health was looking to expand beyond in-patient care so the partnership made for a good match, he said. “And it’s been helpful in setting us on a path toward growth,” he added.

Today, the Hillsdale site has grown from 40,000 square feet to more than 100,000 square feet, and increased the number of providers from 22 physicians in the 1970s to 66 physicians and advanced practice providers today. In addition to primary care physicians, you can find specialists from allergies to urology and (almost)

everything in between. Pediatrics, cardiology, orthopedics, and general surgery are just a few of the specialties available at KHMG. The group also operates two Quick Care locations at its Hillsdale Ave and Ben Maddox locations, plus cardiology in the city of Tulare. The Hillsdale site is also a “one-stop shop” should you require a pharmacy, imaging or lab services, physical therapy, or a sleep study. The variety of services available in one convenient location creates an unmatched continuum of care for patients.

While the name change may take some time to get used to, the clinic is still providing the same great service patients expect from the medical group, Hall said. “As we grow, [the name] Visalia Medical Clinic doesn’t carry much weight in Hanford or Kingsburg. But Kaweah Health, that’s not so city-centric,” he explained.

And growth is the goal, Hall said. They would like to hire physicians in specialties they don’t yet have, and perhaps even expand to more offices. “We don’t want to have to send people out of the area for care,” he said.

For the most part, that’s true already. “You no longer have to leave Visalia to get the best medical care that you need,” Brennan said. “Being able to see your primary care provider, who you trust, who knows and cares for you, who can order labs and imaging here in the same place, all in the same day – that’s amazing. That’s what we want.”

“We’re creating the best health care you can get in one place. That’s the future of medicine,” Brennan said.

A NAME CHANGE FROM VISALIA MEDICAL CLINIC TO KAWEAH HEALTH MEDICAL GROUP IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY FOR THIS 80-YEAR-OLD CLINIC

COLON & RECTAL SURGERY



Kyle Ota, MD

Kaweah Health Medical Group is proud to introduce Kyle Ota, MD to our community. Dr. Ota is a board certified general surgeon who completed his residency at Kaweah Health. He is the only fellowship trained colorectal surgeon between Fresno and Bakersfield. Specializing in the treatment of cancers of the colon, rectum and anus, Dr. Ota offers minimally invasive techniques to patients including laparoscopic and robotic surgery.

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