

Vital Signs

DOC B.A.N.D.

Inspiring our
next generation
of healthcare workers



Vital Signs

Vital Signs
is a publication of
Kaweah Health.

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

At Kaweah Health, change and growth go hand in hand. As I reflect on where we are as an organization, I'm proud of how much has taken shape and energized by what's still ahead.

I'm pleased to share that Kaweah Health Medical Center recently earned an A grade in the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade survey, a distinction earned by fewer than 30 percent of hospitals nationwide. This recognition reflects what our physicians, nurses, and staff pour into their work every single day: a relentless commitment to keeping patients safe.

We are also expanding where and how patients can access care. The new Kaweah Health Medical Clinic – Akers at the Tulare/Akers Professional Building is now open, offering primary and specialty care close to home. The clinic includes 20 exam rooms, a procedure room, and a mental health appointment space, with specialty clinics and potential lab and imaging services on the horizon.

We are excited to welcome pediatrician Kirk Coverston, MD, now practicing at Kaweah Health Medical Clinic – Akers, and cardiothoracic surgeon Trung Ly Tran, MD, who brings advanced robotic surgical skills to our 30-year cardiothoracic surgery program.

Our executive team continues to evolve. Chief Ambulatory Officer Tom Boggs now leads our clinics, population health, and Key Medical Group partnership, strengthening how we coordinate and deliver care across the region. Vice President of Strategy Max Heckhausen brings focus and alignment to strategy, growth, marketing, community engagement, patient experience, and philanthropy. Luke Schneider has stepped into the role of Vice President of Digital and Information Systems, supporting our mission and strategic goals across the organization. Together, Tom, Max, and Luke represent exactly the kind of leaders who understand both the complexity of healthcare and the humanity at its center. We are building a team with complementary skills, deep experience, and a shared commitment to this community — and the best of what we can accomplish together is still ahead.

Earlier this year, Kaweah Health celebrated a significant five-year milestone with the graduation of our inaugural Bachelor of Science in Nursing cohorts from the Kaweah Health Nursing Education Pathway powered by Unitek Nursing College. Two cohorts, one of 13 and another of 25 students successfully completed the academic requirements and received their BSN degrees. This initiative, rooted in the belief that our greatest resource is our own people, now has 132 employees enrolled. These pioneering graduates prove that Kaweah Health is a place where professional opportunity and growth are a reality.

At the end of the day, what drives everything, our leadership team, our facilities, our physicians, and our programs, remains constant. This community deserves outstanding care, close to home, delivered with genuine compassion. That is who we are at Kaweah Health, and the foundation we're building on for an even stronger future.



Marc Mertz
Chief Executive Officer
of Kaweah Health

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Seeing the Signs

In women, heart disease symptoms aren't always obvious.

When Shirley Batchman first heard open heart surgery, she wanted to know her options.

"There is something about the words open heart surgery," Shirley says.

She had no symptoms and didn't know anything was wrong, but at a routine appointment with her cardiologist she failed a stress test. After that she had an angiogram, and her cardiologist informed her he was unable to place

a stent because it would only be a temporary solution.

Her options at this point were to undergo open heart surgery or to opt for medicines.

"That is when I got referred to Dr. (Shelly) Bansal. She is outstanding," Shirley says. "I like that she is no-nonsense and tells you what to expect."

Although Shirley, retired Director of Government Affairs at California Citrus

Mutual, didn't think she had any symptoms, looking back she notes that she got tired easily and thought it was just a part of aging.

Shelly Bansal, MD, a cardiothoracic surgeon, says it is common for women to think things like fatigue are just part of aging.

"Women are greater than 50 percent of the population but a very small percentage of people undergoing heart

procedures or heart surgery," Dr. Bansal says. "Coronary disease in women is very common and underdiagnosed."

She added that it is very important for women to listen to their bodies.

"Despite women presenting later in their disease process than men, Shirley is proof that heart surgery is safe for women and can lead to great outcomes," Dr. Bansal says.

Shirley had heart bypass surgery in November, a procedure used to improve blood flow to

Left: Shirley Batchman is gaining her stamina back after having open heart surgery in November.

Below: Connie Chamberlain, cardiac rehab clinic manager, takes Shirley's blood pressure before her cardiac rehab therapy.



the heart by creating a detour around blocked arteries. After her surgery, she said she had no pain but had to work at building back her endurance.

For that, she attends cardiac rehabilitation at the Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital. The comprehensive program consists of 36 one-hour sessions that include supervised exercise training and education.

The goal of the program is to do the following:

- Improve overall strength and endurance, quality of life and mood
- Give patients a greater sense of well-being and confidence
- Identify factors that contribute to heart disease
- Enhance the life-long management of heart disease
- Decrease hospital readmissions

After surgery and half-way through her cardiac rehabilitation, Shirley says she already feels the difference.

"I'm not as sensitive to needing to park my car close when I go out," Shirley says. "This program is designed for success."



— “
Coronary disease in women is very common and underdiagnosed.
” —

— Dr. Shelly Bansal,
cardiothoracic surgeon

Concerned about your heart?

You don't need a referral to make an appointment with a cardiologist.

Call (559) 624-6520 or make an online appointment at [KaweahHealth.org/Heart](https://www.kaweahhealth.org/Heart).

Transforming Heart Care

Advanced procedures are less invasive with faster recoveries and shorter hospital stays.

Kaweah Health recently began offering four advanced cardiac procedures that allow patients to receive advanced cardiac care without having to leave the area.

“Every patient who receives one of these procedures close to home, near their family, their community, and their support system is a reflection of

what we can accomplish together,” says Jag Batth, Kaweah Health chief operating officer.

The expansion reflects investment in physician training, specialized equipment, and the coordinated teamwork that complex cardiac care demands. At the center of that effort are Kaweah Health’s interventional cardiologists,

Harleen Chahil, MD, Ankur Gupta, MD, Kiran Reddy, MD, Sarmad Said, MD, Shashi Sharma, MD, and Atul Singla, MD, and vascular surgeon LaMar Mack, MD, all of whom have committed significant time to acquiring the training and certifications these procedures require.



Members of Kaweah Health’s surgical heart team pose after performing the hospital’s first MitraClip procedure on May 5. At center are Dr. Harleen Chahil, black jacket, Dr. Bradlee Bachar, behind Chahil right, and Dr. Saibal Kar, right of Chahil.

MitraClip™ Therapy

The mitral valve controls blood flow on the left side of the heart. When it fails to close properly, blood leaks backward, a condition that causes fatigue, shortness of breath, and serious complications over time. The MitraClip procedure repairs the valve by inserting a catheter through a small puncture in the groin, with no open heart surgery required. It is approved for patients who are not candidates for traditional surgical repair.

Interventional Cardiologist Dr. Chahil performed Kaweah Health’s first three MitraClip placements in a single day, a strong start that reflected both the demand for the procedure and the readiness of her team. Those first procedures were overseen and certified by Saibal Kar, MD, director of structural heart disease interventions at Los Robles Health System and a leading expert on MitraClip therapy.

“This is a very important procedure, but it needs to be done at a hospital with a trained, specialized heart team,”

Dr. Kar says. Kaweah Health’s comprehensive cardiology services made it a strong candidate.

“Having the ability to offer this at Kaweah Health means patients do not have to travel for treatment anymore,” says Dr. Chahil. “This treatment can decrease hospitalizations and extend life for patients with this condition.”

The MitraClip becomes a permanent supportive part of the heart with no second procedure required.

Renal Denervation (RDN)

Virginia Drewry, 76, has tried a lot of medications for her high blood pressure. Most recently, patches on her shoulders were damaging her skin. Nothing has worked quite the way it should. When she heard about renal denervation, she was ready.

“I’m tired of all the different medications and not having them work,” Drewry says. “It sounds like this could be good for a lot of people who can’t control their high blood pressure.”

Dr. Sharma and Dr. Mack both performed Kaweah Health’s first RDN procedure using the FDA-approved Symplicity Spyral™ system, which targets overactive nerves near the kidneys that contribute to persistent hypertension. Those nerves are targeted with energy to calm the excessive activity. The procedure leaves no implant behind.

“This procedure really is unique,” Dr. Sharma says. “A patient taking three or more blood pressure medications can reduce that to just one.”

The stakes are significant: according to the CDC, only about 20 percent of U.S. adults diagnosed with high blood pressure have it under control and uncontrolled hypertension is a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. For patients like Drewry, who have run out of conventional options, RDN offers a genuinely new path.



Dr. Shashi Sharma, center holding sign, and his specialized surgical team performed the first Renal Denervation (RDN) procedure on April 27.



Micra™ Leadless Pacemaker

Traditional pacemakers require a surgical pocket in the chest and wires threaded to the heart. The Micra device has no wires or pocket and is implanted directly into the heart itself through a catheter, requiring no open heart surgery. It is 93 percent smaller than a conventional pacemaker. For patients who need heart rhythm support, it represents a remarkable step forward in both comfort and care.

Dr. Sarmad Said, third from right, and his specialized surgical team placed the first Micra Leadless Pacemaker on March 24.

CardioMEMS™ Heart Failure Sensor

Heart failure is among the leading causes of hospitalization in the United States. The CardioMEMS sensor, a tiny wireless device placed in a blood vessel near the heart, continuously monitors pressure levels and alerts care teams to warning signs weeks before a patient feels symptoms. Patients then use an external monitoring device at home. The result: fewer emergency hospitalizations and better long-term outcomes for patients managing a challenging chronic condition.

Patients or family members interested in learning whether these cardiac services may be appropriate for them are encouraged to speak with their primary care provider or contact Kaweah Health directly through [KaweahHealth.org/Heart](https://www.kaweahhealth.org/Heart).



Dr. Harleen Chahil, third from left, and her specialized surgical team performed the first CardioMEMS procedure on April 16.

40 Years Strong

The Kaweah Health Sleep Center team, including Dr. Harjoth Malli, second row, grey sweatshirt, is part of 40 years of improving sleep for you and your family.

Kaweah Health's Sleep Center has been caring for you and your family since 1986.

Kaweah Health Sleep Center has maintained accreditation from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) for 40 consecutive years, demonstrating its commitment to the provision of high-quality care for people who have sleep problems.

"Sleep is one of the most underappreciated pillars of overall health, and we take great pride in our longstanding commitment to diagnosing and treating sleep disorders at Kaweah Health," says Harjoth Malli, MD, Medical Director of the Kaweah Health Sleep Center. "Consistently obtaining adequate, high-quality sleep is essential — without it, individuals face a significantly increased risk of serious health conditions."

Kaweah Health's Sleep Center is one of only nine programs in the nation to achieve the 40-year accreditation milestone in 2026. The AASM has been accrediting sleep disorder centers since 1977.



"The American Academy of Sleep Medicine congratulates Kaweah Health Sleep Center on continuing to meet the rigorous standards necessary to maintain accreditation for sleep services," AASM President Dr. Anita V. Shelgikar says. "AASM accreditation is the gold standard in sleep care, reflecting a commitment to delivering high-quality, patient-centered services that help people sleep better and live healthier lives."

The Kaweah Health Sleep Center provides diagnostic and therapeutic care for people who have problems

related to sleep and alertness. Sleep disorders include obstructive sleep apnea, chronic insomnia, restless legs syndrome, and narcolepsy.

To receive and maintain accreditation for a five-year period, a sleep center must meet or exceed all standards for professional healthcare as designated by the AASM. These standards address core areas such as personnel, facility and equipment, policies and procedures, data acquisition, patient care, and quality assurance. Additionally, the sleep center's goals must be clearly stated and include plans for positively affecting the quality of medical care in the community it serves. There are 2,300 AASM-accredited sleep centers across the country. **KH**

Think you have an issue sleeping? Ask your primary physician about a referral to the Kaweah Health Sleep Center.



Dr. Bradlee Bachar, far left, and Dr. Trung Ly Tran, center holding sign, and their specialized surgical team performed Kaweah Health's first robotic lung cancer surgery on June 11.

1st Robotic Lung Cancer Removal

Kaweah Health • June 11, 2026

Advancing Lung Cancer Care

Robotic surgery offers lung cancer cure with early detection.

Local patients facing a lung cancer diagnosis were having to wait months to go outside the area just to see a specialist and talk about their options. Recognizing this, Kaweah Health began a comprehensive lung cancer program aimed at early detection and saving lives.

On June 11, Trung Ly Tran, MD, a cardiothoracic surgeon, performed the hospital's first robotic lung cancer surgery, marking a big step forward for the community. Using the da Vinci® Xi robot, he was able to remove cancerous growths from the lungs through four small incisions.

"We saw the need for faster lung cancer diagnosis," says Jag Batth, Kaweah Health Chief Operating Officer. "Having Dr. Tran and the ability to do this complex procedure is life saving for our community."

Although lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S., early detection significantly improves treatment outcomes and survival rates. That

is why reducing the wait time to see a specialist is so important, Batth says.

Dr. Tran, who joined the cardiothoracic program in April, is the final step in the process of treating lung cancer before it spreads. It begins with a low-dose CT scan to look for early signs of lung cancer. The scan is quick and painless and can detect small lung nodules or abnormalities years before they appear on an X-ray.

Patients work with Pam Montgomery, RN, an oncology nurse navigator, who guides them through the screening and follow-up process.

Walter Gribben, MD, a pulmonologist, comes in when nodules are found on the scan. He will do a biopsy of those nodules, where a small sample is collected to confirm whether the nodule is cancerous. Dr. Gribben uses Ion Robotic Bronchoscopy, which is a robot system that helps to navigate the bronchoscope precisely to the lung nodules that are small or hard to reach. This

allows the diagnoses to be made more quickly, and treatment to begin faster.

If surgery is needed, Dr. Tran uses the da Vinci to remove cancer from the lungs. Because the surgery requires a highly trained cardiothoracic surgeon like Dr. Tran, Kaweah Health is one of a few hospitals able to offer this procedure in the Central Valley. Dr. Tran explained robotic surgery has many benefits, including less blood loss, lower risk of wound infection, reduced pain after surgery, minimal scarring, faster recovery, and shorter hospital stays. This surgery is possible when lung cancer is caught early and has not spread.

"Surgery can be the cure in those cases," Dr. Tran says.

From the initial scan through surgery, Kaweah Health is aiming to detect lung cancer early and save lives. **KH**

Learn more about Kaweah Health's lung cancer screening program at [KawahHealth.org/Lung](https://www.kawahhealth.org/Lung).



CONGRATULATIONS STACEY HEHN, RN 2026 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Stacey Hehn has been a Kaweah Health employee for two decades, growing from a Health Unit Coordinator and Student Nurse Intern into a Registered Nurse and Nursing Professional Development Practitioner. She is the steady presence her department depends on — mentoring new nurses at the bedside, advancing critical programs, and quietly making everything around her better.

Colleagues describe Stacey as the rock of her department — a compassionate caregiver, tireless mentor, and trusted resource who greets everyone in the hallway and never walks past a patient who might need help. She goes above and beyond not for recognition, but because that is simply who she is.

Her hands-on teaching style is unmatched. She frequently jumps into

critical trauma cases to mentor staff on complex procedures, always reminding the team to care for every patient as a member of their family.

Stacey embodies our core values of compassion, excellence, and service. Kaweah Health is honored to name Stacey Hehn as its 2026 Employee of the Year. KH



Employee of the year Stacey Hehn is greeted by CEO Marc Mertz and the executive team.

Each member of the Kaweah Health team contributes in some way to our mission: Health is our passion. Excellence is our focus. Compassion is our promise. Each year around Hospital Week, the Kaweah Health Starlight Awards honor those team members from each division who have been nominated by their peers for being world-class employees. This year's ceremony honored individual team members whose dedication, hard work, and commitment to delivering world-class care have made a profound impact on the lives of patients, the community, and the overall well-being of the organization.

See all the Starlight Award winners at KaweahHealth.org/2026Awards.

Kaweah Health also recognizes peer-nominated employees each month for their exceptional performance.

2025 Employee of the Month Winners

January: [Brittany McGarran](#), Staff Facilitator

February: [Angel Pena](#), Security Officer

March: [Diane Hayes](#), Grants Coordinator

April: [Adela Alvarez](#), Certified Nursing Assistant

May: [David Crowther](#), Clinical Pharmacist

June: [Alberto Pena](#), Kaweah Kids' Head Teacher

July: [Wendy Parsons](#), Charge Nurse

August: [Benny Alva](#), Construction Technician

September: [Breane Tankersley](#), Registered Nurse Home Health

October: [Matilde Saldivar](#), Environmental Services Lead

November: [Rosario Ayala Reyes](#), SRCC Medical Assistant/Phlebotomist

December: [Cynthia Brito](#), Patient Access Specialist



Finding Their Path

El Diamante student Thaily Campos Reyes learns how to intubate a patient with help from emergency medicine resident Dr. Eduardo Amaya.

Visalia students receive hands-on experience and mentoring at unique Kaweah Health event.

Redwood High School student Bianca Lumapas was having doubts about pursuing a nursing career. Then her teacher nominated her to attend Doc Build and Navigate Your Destiny (Doc B.A.N.D.) at Kaweah Health, an event that gives high school students interested in healthcare careers hands-on experience in Kaweah Health's nationally recognized simulation laboratory (SIM Lab), along with a dinner where students can ask questions of medical professionals and explore various healthcare fields.

"After experiencing the simulation labs and speaking with healthcare professionals, I fully believe that healthcare is the right path for me," Bianca says. "I found it helpful since I got to hear their personal work experiences, which provides more insight than just googling professions."

At the SIM Lab, participants rotated through six interactive stations: Stop the Bleed, Intubation, CPR, Physical Therapy, Labor and Delivery, and Ultrasound. At each station, students

practiced skills using medical manikins, gaining practical insights into different healthcare specialties.

Bianca's teacher, Lizel Bettencourt, says the opportunity to take part in hands-on activities and meet local professionals can shape a student's future academic and career choices.

"Students need these experiences while they are in high school so they can make informed decisions about their next steps," says Lizel,



Left: Physical therapist Kylee Roberge demonstrates strength testing with a dynamometer on Golden West student Damian Ramos as other Golden West students watch (l-r) Kaylee Ngai, Tarek Elsharkawy, Golden West chemistry teacher, Natasha Hurtad, Elaine Rubio, Doc B.A.N.D. committee member, Connor Cain, and Nathan Mello.

Below: El Diamante student Jayda Toor practices placing a bag valve mask on a patient.



who teaches chemistry at Redwood. "Doc B.A.N.D. can open up new possibilities for a student."

About 20 juniors from each of Visalia Unified School District's four comprehensive high schools, along with 10 juniors from Central Valley Christian School are chosen by their teachers to attend each year. The event is hosted by VUSD and Kaweah Health.

Golden West High School chemistry teacher Tarek Elsharkawy says that while the SIM Lab offers a realistic glimpse into daily hospital life, networking with medical professionals is an invaluable experience for students.

"The majority of students expressed the greatest interest in the personal conversations they had with the physicians, residents, and nurses," Tarek

— “
Students need these experiences while they are in high school so they can make informed decisions about their next steps.
” —

— Lizel Bettencourt,
Redwood High
School chemistry
teacher

says. “Students recognized that these professionals are normal people with normal personal lives.”

He added that students appreciated how honest and open the medical professionals were when discussing the realities of a healthcare career.

future,” says Max Heckhausen, Kaweah Health vice president of strategy. “By bringing local students into our SIM Lab and giving them a chance to interact closely with



Above:
Dr. Bryce Granata talks with students during the Doc B.A.N.D. dinner.

Left:
Samantha Cervantes, El Diamante student, learns how to intubate a patient.



other skilled healthcare workers to the Central Valley can be challenging, which is why encouraging local students, who are more likely to return to the area to serve their community, is so valuable.

Bryce Granata, MD, a resident physician in Kaweah Health’s Graduate Medical Education program, said he was excited to talk with the students.

“It was a perfect way to show some of the amazing things we get to do in medicine,” Dr. Granata says. “I benefited a ton from mentors and people who supported me and truly, I would not be able to do what I do without them. Medicine is a team sport and I’m always excited to make connections with and

build up aspiring medical professionals and grow the team.”

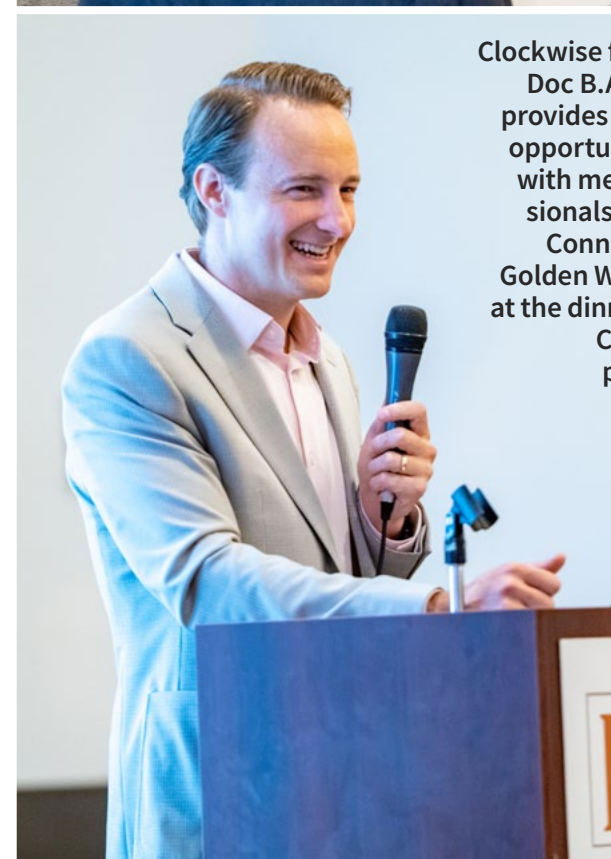
For Bianca, Doc B.A.N.D. was time well spent, solidifying healthcare as her future career.

our doctors, nurses, and other professionals, we’re opening windows into possible career paths they might never have imagined.”

Recruiting physicians, nurses, and

For Kaweah Health, Doc B.A.N.D. is more than just a tour or a career day.

“It’s about inspiring the next generation of healthcare professionals and investing directly in our community’s



Clockwise from the top:
Doc B.A.N.D. dinner provides students the opportunity to speak with medical professionals, Gracie Luis, Connor Cain, both Golden West students at the dinner, Dr. Kevin Cowan gives a presentation.



“I owe this decision to the kind and welcoming healthcare professionals who were more than willing to answer my many questions about their fields,” she says. **KH**



Kaweah Health leadership, staff, and community members cut the ribbon at the Kaweah Health Medical Clinic – Akers.

Schengel Steps Up

New board member strives to continue securing well-trained workforce.

Jonna Schengel is sworn in as a member of the Kaweah Health Board of Directors.



Your Clinic, Your Care

Kaweah Health’s new Akers clinic is a convenient family and specialty location.

Kaweah Health’s newest outpatient clinic is now open at the Tulare/Akers Professional Building on the corner of Akers Street and Tulare Avenue in Visalia. Known as the Kaweah Health Medical Clinic – Akers, the new clinic currently offers pediatrics, primary care, dermatology, and mental health with additional specialties coming soon.

The clinic will serve patients in the area while also helping recruit new physicians. Kaweah Health CEO Marc Mertz explained that one challenge with recruiting more physicians to the area is the lack of contemporary clinic space.

“The type of clinic we were looking for didn’t exist, so we decided to build it ourselves,” Mertz says. “We chose to partner with Tulare County

to remodel a portion of this beautiful, well-maintained building.”

Once offices for The Cigna Group, the Tulare/Akers Professional Building is now home to the Tulare County Sheriff’s Office, Tulare County Elections Office, and the IRS. Kaweah Health is leasing space from the county for the clinic.

“This is our building, and we are very happy to have Kaweah Health here,” Tulare County Supervisor Amy Shuklian says. “Anything the county can do to expand healthcare here is a good thing.”

Not all the space Kaweah Health leased has been remodeled.

“As excited as we are about this clinic, we are thinking about what else we can do here,” Mertz says. “There is

additional space for two specialty clinics already in design.” He added that lab services and imaging may also be added, making the building a one-stop shop for patients.

The new clinic has 20 exam rooms, a procedure room, and a room for mental health appointments. Currently, the clinic is home to pediatricians Ester Flores Midence, MD, and Kirk Coverston, MD, family practice physician Gaylene Soloniuk-Tays, MD, Andrew Kim, NP, and Spencer Packer, PA. They are joined by dermatologist Carla Herriford, MD, and psychiatrist Karanbir Randhawa, MD. **KH**

Kaweah Health Medical Clinic – Akers is located at 5300 W. Tulare Ave., Suite 100. Call (559) 839-2200 to make an appointment or to learn more.

Jonna Schengel came to Visalia to treat patients. She ended up transforming how the people who treat them are trained in the Central Valley. Now she is bringing that experience to the Kaweah Health Board of Directors as the Zone 2 representative.

Schengel, PT, MA, Ed.D., fills the seat vacated by the retirement of Lynn Havard Mirviss, RN, Ed.D., and will serve through December 4, 2026. She was selected from a pool of highly qualified candidates, chosen for her depth of expertise in healthcare education and workforce development.

“The employees of Kaweah Health are our greatest asset, and I hope my experience with patient care can help Kaweah Health become the best place to work in healthcare,” Jonna says.

Schengel recently retired as Dean of Career Technical Education and Workforce Development at College of the Sequoias, where she oversaw programs in Industry and Technology, Manufacturing, Nursing, and Allied Health. But her roots in hands-on care run deep. After years of treating patients as a physical therapist, she

founded Central California Physical Therapy Specialists.

Jonna says she was always interested in healthcare, but it was while teaching swimming lessons to a boy with an amputated leg that she saw how much impact his physical therapist had on his recovery and ability to regain his strength.

“I always enjoyed working directly with patients, and helping them learn to move correctly brought me great satisfaction,” Jonna says. “And I developed wonderful relationships with those I treated.”

As a private practice owner, she experienced firsthand the difficulty of finding and keeping employees who wanted to go into physical therapy. To address that, she developed the physical therapist assistant program at COS from the ground up and significantly expanded the nursing program.

“I was able to help change the lives of students by providing them with a great job and benefits,” Jonna says. “I found a new calling in workforce development, especially in the healthcare arena.”

That is work she will continue as part of the Kaweah Health Board, as she sees securing a well-trained workforce as one of the organization’s largest challenges.

“I have worked with Kaweah Health over the last several years to help meet the challenges of the nursing shortage, and I see further opportunity to find ways to recruit and retain other high-quality healthcare providers,” Jonna says.

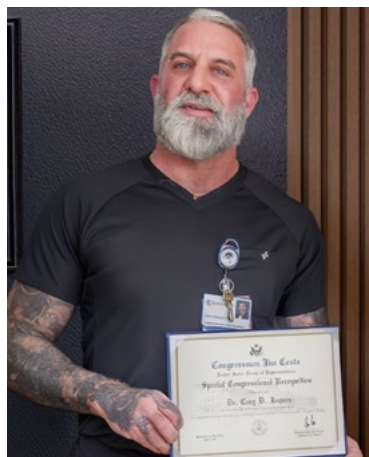
Kaweah Health is the community name for the Kaweah Delta Health Care District, a public hospital district serving the greater Visalia area. The district covers 183 square miles, encompassing all of Visalia and Goshen and parts of Ivanhoe and Farmersville. The district is divided into five equally populated zones, each represented on the board by a locally elected member. Board members serve four-year terms and may run for re-election without limit. **KH**

To learn more about Kaweah Health’s Board of Directors, visit [KaweahHealth.org/Board](https://www.kaweahhealth.org/Board)

Excellence is Our Focus

Three Kaweah Health team members honored for their outstanding community service.

Three Kaweah Health team members have recently been recognized with prestigious awards for their outstanding dedication to patients and the communities they serve.



Dr. Cory D. Jaques: American Red Cross 2026 Central Valley Healthcare Hero

Cory D. Jaques, MD, a children’s psychiatrist at Kaweah Health, received the American Red Cross 2026 Central Valley Healthcare Hero Award for his dedication to reshaping crisis care for children across the region.

Working in emergency departments, inpatient units, and community clinics, Dr. Jaques is known for his thoughtful, individualized approach, earning the trust of countless families.

He was instrumental in establishing Kaweah Health’s Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit, which provides 24/7 crisis intervention for children and youth 21 and under. He also directs the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellowship, training the next generation of psychiatrists to serve the region’s youth.



Dr. Ryan Howard: Donor Network West Foundation President’s Award

Ryan Howard, MD, a hospice and palliative medicine specialist at Kaweah Health, received the Donor Network West Foundation’s President’s Award for his extraordinary leadership in advancing organ donation.

Dr. Howard and the Kaweah Health Hospice and Palliative Care Team are known for keeping each patient’s voice and wishes central during life’s most difficult moments, thoughtfully bridging palliative care with donation discussions so families feel supported and never rushed.

Dr. Howard was quick to share the honor: “The majority of the credit is attributable to the wonderfully capable and compassionate, dedicated hospice and palliative medicine team members at Kaweah Health.”



Kelly Pierce: Tulare-Kings College and Career Collaborative’s 2026 CTE Industry Champion Award

Kelly Pierce, volunteer and career pathway manager at Kaweah Health, received the Tulare-Kings College and Career Collaborative’s 2026 CTE Industry Champion Award for her dedication to expanding work-based learning opportunities for students across the region.

Through job shadows, internships, and clinical experiences, Kelly places about 500 student volunteers annually, opening doors for future healthcare professionals and strengthening the connection between education and workforce development.

“I love helping people find what they want to do in life,” Kelly says. “Working in healthcare isn’t just about being a nurse or a doctor, there are so many other opportunities.”

Grade A Care

Kaweah Health is recognized for patient safety.

Kaweah Health Medical Center earned an A Hospital Safety Grade from The Leapfrog Group, an independent national nonprofit watchdog focused on patient safety. The grade is a national distinction recognizing Kaweah Health’s achievements in protecting patients from harm and error in the hospital.

“This is a wonderful accomplishment by our employees and medical staff, who work hard to maintain a high-quality, safe environment for patients and visitors,” Marc Mertz, Kaweah Health CEO, says. “I’m proud of the work our teams are putting in every day to ensure they deliver world-class healthcare to our community.”

Leapfrog assigns an A, B, C, D or F grade to general hospitals across the country using evidence-based measures of patient safety focused exclusively on errors, accidents, injuries, and infections.

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade stands as the only hospital ratings program focused solely on preventable medical errors, infections, and injuries, that kill more than 500 patients per day in the United States. This program is peer-reviewed, fully transparent and free to the public. Grades are updated twice annually, in the fall and spring.

Kaweah Health also finished its Joint Commission survey in the spring, retaining its gold seal accreditation. Joint Commission surveyors conducted on-site observations and interviews to identify performance strengths and opportunities for continued improvement.

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED

A

SPRING 2026

LEAPFROG
HOSPITAL
SAFETY GRADE

With decades of expertise and a data-driven accreditation process, Joint Commission helps ensure healthcare organizations adhere to leading quality and safety practices, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and commitment to better patient care. Retaining this accreditation is another example of Kaweah Health’s dedication to patient safety and care. 

A Year Worth Celebrating



Clockwise from top left: Golf Classic, Moonshine Soirée, \$2 million milestone for Tiny Feet, Big Steps, and Heritage Club celebration.

This year, the Kaweah Health Foundation reached new milestones thanks to the generosity of our donors, sponsors, employees, and community partners. We celebrated landmark events, launched new traditions, and made meaningful investments in patient care — all while advancing our largest campaign to date.

Together, we invested in patient care through new Starlight gaming systems for children and families in the Pediatric Unit, a BrainScope for the Emergency Department, and a new blood pressure machine for the Kaweah Health Lifestyle Fitness Center.

Every dollar raised brought us closer to a healthier community, and every partnership reminded us of what's possible when we work together toward a shared mission. Because of you, healthcare here is stronger than ever.

- **\$185,000+** raised at Moonshine Soirée for Ruth Wood Open Arms House
- **\$142,000+** raised at the Golf Classic for community healthcare initiatives
- **\$50,000+** raised across seven Breast Cancer Awareness events
- **\$150,000** in departmental mini-grants invested in patient care
- **\$2.1 million** raised toward our \$3.1 million campaign goal in less than 18 months
- **40 years** of the Heritage Club celebrated
- **2 new** annual events launched: Twinkle & Toast and Run to Remember

For more information visit KaweahHealth.org/Foundation.



70 Years of Service

Kaweah Health Hospital Guild has been serving the hospital from the beginning.

Guild members Annie Sullivan (L) and Poornima Cholkar laugh together while assembling dialysis kits. Camaraderie keeps Guild members volunteering.



Every week Annie Sullivan helps make sure the team at Kaweah Health's Dialysis Center has everything it needs for patients, carefully putting together all the supplies needed in a convenient packet. A job she takes pride in because her husband was once a patient at the center.

"The staff here is amazing," Annie says. "They were so wonderful to my husband. I look at these packets and I know each of them represents a patient."

Annie is part of the Kaweah Health Hospital Guild, an organization of dedicated volunteers that is celebrating its 70th year. Founded in 1956, before the hospital district even existed, the Guild has stood strong through the decades, donating millions of dollars' worth of volunteer hours and patient care equipment.

"Their help is immeasurable," says Connie Green, nurse manager at the Dialysis Center. "It is hard for us to do patient care and gather all the supplies, which need to stay sterile, so having these packets is amazing for us."

Although Annie has only been a member of the Guild for a year, her husband, Tommy, was a long-standing member and the only man so far to serve as president.

"It was always his thing," Annie says. "It took a year after he passed before I was ready to join them."

She fit right in once she joined. Guild member Dorothy Sargent highlighted how the camaraderie between Guild members is a big part of what makes the organization so special.

"It's valuable, both to the hospital and to the volunteers," Dorothy says. "For many years, we were known as the pink ladies for our pink coats, and you could always find us throughout the hospital."

Guild member Poornima Cholkar says the power of that pink coat always amazes her. She remembered a time when she was volunteering in the ICU and had to manage the flow of visitors. There was one woman who was not very happy with her, yelling and being rude.

"When I was finally able to let her in, she saw my pink coat and instantly says 'oh, you're one of the pink ladies', and suddenly her whole attitude changed," Poornima says.

The pandemic changed how and where Guild members could volunteer, but they are still active, making packets at the Dialysis Center and welcoming patients at Kaweah Health Admissions and Testing Services. They have also begun volunteering at Kaweah Health

Sequoia Regional Cancer Center and assisting with the therapy dogs that visit both patients and employees. Guild members also bring their talents to creating handmade patient gifts, such as crocheted blankets, pillows and newborn baby hats.

The Guild holds three unique fundraisers each year, raising money for patient comfort items. Members host masquerade jewelry, care wear, and purse and leather sales, each twice per year. The masquerade jewelry sale features items starting at \$5, while the purse and leather sale features high-end purses and leather goods. The care wear sale includes the sale of scrubs, shoes, and uniforms for healthcare workers.

In the past year the Guild made \$16,000 from these fundraisers, says Donna Archer, Guild member. That money goes directly into funding the blankets, hats, and pillows the Guild provides each month. Once per month the hospital receives a delivery of six caps, 28 blankets, and 105 pillows, all handmade by Guild members, Archer says.

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You can join the Kaweah Health Hospital Guild for just \$15 per year and four hours per month of your time. For more information visit KaweahHealth.org/Volunteer.

Introducing

Kaweah Health is excited to welcome cardiothoracic surgeon Trung Ly Tran, MD, and pediatrician Kirk Coverston, MD.



Dr. Trung Ly Tran
Cardiothoracic surgeon

Dr. Tran joins Dr. Shelly Bansal and Dr. Frederick Mayer in the cardiothoracic surgery program. He most recently worked for Mercy Hospital Northwest Arkansas. He has family in both Northern and Southern California, so he felt the Central Valley was a perfect centralized location to make his home.

“I’m excited to bring my skills in robotic surgery to Kaweah Health’s growing cardiothoracic program,” Dr. Tran said. Kaweah Health’s cardiothoracic surgery program began 30 years ago in 1996 and with the addition of Dr. Tran will be able to serve even more patients.

Dr. Tran is board-certified in cardiac, thoracic, and general surgery. He completed his medical education at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He did his residency in general surgery at Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, followed by a cardiothoracic surgery fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Heart Institute in Houston. Dr. Tran’s specialty areas include coronary artery bypass, heart valve repair/replacement, aortic aneurysm repair, lung resections, and mediastinal and chest wall tumor removal.

“I make sure a patient understands all aspects of their surgery,” Dr. Tran says. “A patient’s understanding not only helps me with my surgery, but it also helps the patient with their recovery when they know what is happening.”

He specializes in minimally invasive cardiac and thoracic robotic surgery and works with Kaweah Health’s newest Ion surgical robot.



Dr. Kirk Coverston
Pediatrician

Dr. Coverston joins Kaweah Health’s primary care team, practicing out of the new Akers Clinic. With more than 20 years of experience in pediatrics, he brings a wealth of knowledge and a deep commitment to the Visalia community he has long called home.

“Kaweah Health is a big part of the community,” Dr. Coverston says. “When I hurt my hip, I came here. I want to be part of that healthcare community.”

Dr. Coverston is board-certified by the American Board of Pediatrics. He earned his bachelor’s degree from the University of Southern California, followed by his medical degree from Ross University School of Medicine in Miramar, Florida. He completed his residency at Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital at Michigan State University. His move to Kaweah Health reflects his desire to contribute to the larger healthcare picture in the region, and Kaweah Health’s partnership with Valley Children’s Hospital further supports his commitment to ensuring patients have continuity of care, especially when a patient needs a higher level of care.

Dr. Tran and Dr. Coverston are examples of Kaweah Health continuing to work toward adding more doctors to serve our ever-growing community, while making sure they are a good fit for our patients and the Central Valley.

Classes

Prepared Childbirth Classes

\$35, registration includes participant and one support person

Second Wednesday of the month

6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Kaweah Health Multiservices Center
402 W. Acequia Ave., Visalia, CA 93291
Register: KaweahHealth.org/Classes

Breastfeeding Class

Free, registration includes participant and one support person

Wednesday, July 15

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Kaweah Health Acequia Wing
Mother-Baby Classroom, 3rd floor
305 W. Acequia Ave., Visalia, CA 93291
Register: KaweahHealth.org/Classes

Cancer Related Lymphedema Class

Free

Thursday, Aug. 6

3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Check website for future dates.

Kaweah Health Sequoia Regional
Cancer Center
Maynard and Pauline Fought
Conference Room
4945 W. Cypress Ave., Visalia, CA 93277
Register: vcarvaja@kaweahhealth.org

Support Groups

Grief Support Groups

First Tuesday of the month

10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Quail Park at Shannon Ranch
3440 W. Flagstaff Ave., Visalia, CA 93291

First Tuesday of the month

2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Radiant Church
515 E. Center Ave., Visalia, CA 93292

Second Tuesday of the month

10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Quail Park on Cypress
4520 W. Cypress Ave., Visalia, CA 93277

First Wednesday of the month

10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Radiant Church
432 E. Pleasant Ave., Tulare, CA 93274

Diabetes Among Friends Support Groups

Take place monthly March – October

First Monday of the month

5:30 to 7:00 p.m. – English

Visalia Senior Center
310 N. Locust St., Visalia, CA, 93291

Second Thursday of the month

10:00 to 11:30 a.m. – English

Tulare Senior Citizens Center
201 N. F Street, Tulare CA, 93274

Second Thursday of the month

5:30 to 7:00 p.m. (English/Spanish)

Dinuba Parenting Network
597 N. Alta Ave., Dinuba, CA, 93618

Tuesday Cancer Support Group

For newly diagnosed patients and/or cancer patients in treatment and their loved ones.

Meets weekly — Every Tuesday

10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Kaweah Health
Sequoia Regional Cancer Center
Resource room
4945 W. Cypress Ave., Visalia, CA, 93277

Visalia Walk with a Doc

Second Saturday of the month
Year round

8:00 to 9:15 a.m.

Blain Park
3101 S. Court St., Visalia, CA, 93277

Healthy Lindsay – Healthy Community

Wellness Support Groups
Monthly March – October

Lindsay groups and walk only for
Lindsay residents

Third Tuesday of the month

10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (English)

Lindsay Senior Center
911 N. Parkside
Lindsay, CA, 93247

Fourth Thursday of the month

5:30 to 7:30 p.m. – Spanish

Lindsay Family Resource Center
400 E. Hermosa, Lindsay, CA, 93247

Lindsay Community Walk

Workshops and presentations on the following topics: Diabetes, Healthy Living Workshops, Stroke Prevention, Colon Cancer and assistance connecting to resources.

Fourth Saturday of the month

7:30 to 8:30 a.m.

Lindsay City Park
850 N Elmwood Ave.
Lindsay, CA, 93247

To schedule a presentation or to learn more about our community outreach health education programs call (559) 624-2520 or (559) 624-2416.

New Clinic in Visalia!

Family Medicine, Pediatrics,
Dermatology, and Behavioral
Health Services at Akers Street
and Tulare Avenue

Kaweah Health Medical Clinic - Akers

delivers expert, compassionate care in a beautiful, newly furnished setting. We currently provide family medicine, pediatrics, dermatology, and behavioral health services. Other specialties are on the way.

Easy access. Convenient hours.
Expert care. Everything you'd expect
from Kaweah Health.

VISIT: KaweahHealth.org/Akers

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OUR PHYSICIANS

Dr. Carla Herriford
Dermatology

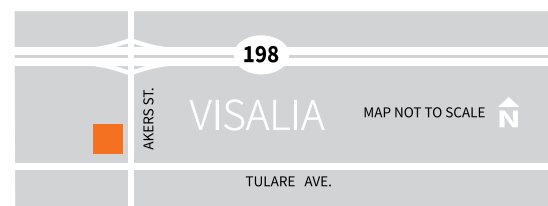
Dr. Gaylene Soloniuk-Tays
Family Medicine

Dr. Kirk Coverston
Pediatrics

Dr. Ester Flores Midence
Pediatrics

Dr. Karanbir Randhawa
Psychiatry

For appointments call (559) 839-2200



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