Discover Your Path to a Healthier, Happier Life

Weight Loss Management with Options, Support

COVID-19 Testing Services for Individuals, Businesses

Virtual Programs and Education
Since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the Merrimack Valley in February, our world has changed before our eyes. This pandemic has tested our hospital like never before, and the work of our physicians, nurses and staff to get us through has been nothing short of heroic.

Facing one of the worst outbreaks in the state, these professionals stepped up to the front lines and didn’t just care for our patients, but also innovated new best practices, took on new roles and transformed care spaces. And when we were ready to welcome back patients for elective and non-urgent services, they took every step to ensure you can get the care you need safely and with confidence.

This kind of response is not something you can practice. It comes from our commitment to our mission to put Patients First in Everything We Do, words that guides every decision we make. It is also a result of a sustained culture of excellence, which allows us to become one of just 2% of hospitals in the country to have earned the gold standard Magnet Recognition for Nursing Excellence three consecutive times.

We also could not have done this without you. Our community has lifted us up since the pandemic began, and when we asked for your support with our recent Help Us Heal campaign, you raised more than $1 million. The pandemic isn’t over, but through struggle comes strength, and we know there is no challenge we can’t handle together.

On your first visit back to one of our campuses, clinics or urgent care centers, you will see things look and feel a little different. Please know that we are still here for you, offering the same outstanding care you’ve come to expect from Circle Health and Lowell General Hospital, in the safest and most effective ways possible.

Jody White is President and CEO of Lowell General Hospital and Circle Health, and Executive Vice President of Wellforce.

For Your Health, Circle Health Website Named Best in New England

For Your Health has been named the best healthcare publication in New England for the third time in four years, one of two Gold Lamplighter Awards Lowell General received this year from the New England Society of Healthcare Communications.

For Your Health won in the General Publications category, which was broadened this year to include all healthcare publications, from handbooks to newspaper supplements. The content and design for For Your Health are produced three times a year by Lowell General Hospital’s Public Relations and Marketing team, along with professional photography from Tory Wesnofske of Lowell.

The hospital also won gold in the Website category for its redesign of the Circle Health website, where patients can now schedule urgent care visits, find a physician and much more at www.circle-health.org.

If you have ideas of how we can improve our publications, website or any other source of information about Lowell General, e-mail us at public.relations@lowellgeneral.org.
What Does it Mean for You?

Lowell General Hospital has achieved Magnet Recognition for Nursing Excellence for a third consecutive time, something only 2% of all hospitals in the country can say. It’s an enormous honor and source of pride for the hospital, but what does it mean for patients? A lot, actually.

“Magnet hospitals aspire to excellence, not just in nursing but in all they do,” says Cece Lynch, Chef Nurse Executive at Lowell General. “For patients, that means they can trust that our nurses, doctors and staff use the highest standards of care and those actions lead to great outcomes. And we have the data to prove it.”

The Magnet Recognition Program — which involves an extensive application and review process by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), the largest and most prominent nurses credentialing organization in the world — identifies health care organizations that provide the very best in nursing care and professionalism in nursing practice.

The concept of so-called “magnet hospitals” came out of a nursing shortage in the early 1980s. The American Nursing Association undertook a study to better understand why some hospitals seemed to have more success recruiting and retaining nurses while maintaining strong patient outcomes.

The researchers found that these hospitals shared “Forces of Magnetism” like transformational leadership, empowered nurses, outstanding professional practice, innovation and improvement, and strong data to back it up.

Using the results of the study, the American Nurses Credentialing Center created the Magnet Recognition Program to provide a path for healthcare organizations to institute and foster these best practices.

“Magnet provides a framework for organizations to ensure best practices and strong structures are in place,” says Diane Regan, RN, Director of Nursing Practice and Magnet Program Director at Lowell General. “Whatever it is you are looking to improve upon, involving staff and interdisciplinary members of the team are essential in supporting high quality outcomes.”

More than a decade ago, Lowell General Hospital felt it met these high standards and successfully earned entry into this exclusive group in 2010 and again in 2015. An organization must reapply every four years, and Lowell General was scheduled for its third review in April when the pandemic arrived.

When the ANCC was ready to resume its review process in June, Lowell General became one of the first hospitals to have it done virtually, giving tours of the units via tablets.

“We were still fighting the pandemic, but we knew that the appraisers would see a true Magnet organization in action when they came for our virtual site visit,” Regan says.

The reason so few organizations receive consecutive recognitions is the challenge of putting structures in place to maintain this high level of care. And each time around, the ANCC raises the bar.

“Now more than ever, the Commission on Magnet wants to see outcomes in terms of quality indicators and decreased mortality, and they want to see a continually improving organization,” Regan says.

For patients and their families, that means everything.

“Magnet means you will receive superior care with better outcomes, satisfaction and access to the best staff from all areas of clinical expertise,” Lynch says.

For more information about the Magnet Recognition Program, visit www.nursingworld.org/magnet.
Welcoming New Providers to Circle Health

At Circle Health, we’re dedicated to meeting the growing needs of our communities. That means expanding our network of physicians who are committed to keeping you healthy, providing expert care and treating you with the attention you deserve. With more physicians, we can accept new patients and maintain the Complete connected care™ that is the promise of Circle Health. **All of the following physicians are accepting new patients.**

**Anas Ahmed, MD**  
Specialist  
Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Board Certified  
Lung Specialists of the Merrimack Valley  
Lowell  
978-934-9220

**Natalie Bowen, MD**  
Primary Care Physician  
Pediatrics, Board Certified  
Lowell Community Health Center  
Lowell  
978-937-9700

**Deepthi Desai, MD**  
Primary Care Physician  
Family Medicine, Board Certified  
Lowell Community Health Center  
Lowell  
978-937-9700

**Maureen Dziura, MD**  
Specialist  
Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Board Certified  
Lung Specialists of the Merrimack Valley  
Lowell  
978-934-9220

**Riad Ettunsi, MD**  
Primary Care Physician  
Internal Medicine, Board Certified  
Merrimack Valley Internal Medicine Associates  
North Chelmsford  
978-459-2152

**Young Bae Kim, MD**  
Specialist  
Gynecologic Oncology, Board Certified  
Cancer Care Associates  
Lowell  
978-937-6258

**Cléa Moore, MD**  
Primary Care Physician  
Family Medicine with Obstetrics  
Merrimack Family Medicine  
Tewksbury  
978-851-4141

**Caitlin Polistena, MD**  
Specialist  
Surgery  
Precision Surgical Specialists of Lowell  
Chelmsford  
978-995-3292

**Nathan Riddell, MD**  
Specialist  
Cardiovascular Disease, Board Certified  
Merrimack Valley Cardiology Associates  
North Chelmsford  
978-256-6607

**Asma Tariq, MD**  
Specialist  
Pulmonary Medicine, Board Certified  
Lung Specialists of the Merrimack Valley  
Lowell  
978-934-9220

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**Need a physician?**

For information on more than 700 physicians in over 30 specialties, call an advisor 24/7 at 1-877-LGH-WELL (1-800-544-9355) or visit www.lowellgeneral.org/findaphysician.

To learn more about our new primary care physicians, visit circle-health.org/newPCPs. To learn more about our new specialists, visit circle-health.org/newspecialists.
When you are having a baby or need gynecological care, nothing is more important than having outstanding healthcare providers and state-of-the-art services that can be accessed safely and conveniently.

That is just one reason WomanHealth, a trusted provider in the greater Lowell community for over 25 years, and OB/GYN Associates of the Merrimack Valley officially joined together under the name Circle Health OB/GYN this fall.

Circle Health OB/GYN patients not only have the convenience of appointments close to where they live or work, but also benefit from extended office hours at three office locations in Dracut, North Chelmsford and Westford. All locations have early morning and later evening appointments to provide improved accessibility for patients.

Circle Health OB/GYN is led by a team of highly-skilled board-certified physicians, nurse practitioners and a nurse midwife who provide a full range of comprehensive obstetrical and gynecological services to women from adolescence through maturity.

With expertise in gynecologic care, obstetrics, urinary incontinence, menopause and gynecologic cancer, our physicians use the most up-to-date technology for care, diagnosis and treatment and have been recognized by the AAGL and Surgical Review Corporation for excellence in minimally invasive gynecology surgery through the use of robotics.

For women who are expecting, Circle Health OB/GYN offers a team approach so patients have the option to see multiple providers in the practice or choose to have appointments with the same provider. A new Prenatal Navigator program ensures that all patients have a dedicated resource available to help them with scheduling the many appointments and tests needed at the beginning of pregnancy.

From the time of a positive pregnancy test, the Prenatal Navigator works with the expectant mom to schedule education sessions, the first OB appointment, ultrasounds and other testing; answer questions about classes, seminars and support groups; and serves as a liaison with providers to ensure that any questions and concerns on clinical issues are resolved.

The practice has also streamlined safety measures for patients to allow for social distancing whenever possible. Telemedicine and videoconferencing appointments are available, and a “virtual waiting room” ensures that patients enter the building only when their sanitized room is ready.

Whether you are a teen or young woman looking for routine gynecologic care, are ready to start a family, or are nearing menopause, Circle Health OB/GYN staff is dedicated to creating a caring and respectful environment during every visit.

To make an appointment or learn more about the services provided, visit www.circlehealthobgyn.org.
For Tewksbury Dad, Weight Loss Surgery Was Worth the Wait

At 5-foot-8 and 295 pounds, Scott Strainge knew his weight was a contributing factor to his health issues. He was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes eight years ago, which eventually progressed to a point where he needed seven different medications a day to keep his blood sugar and blood pressure under control.

When he started getting more frequent and serious skin infections, his endocrinologist at Circle Health’s Diabetes and Endocrine Center became more and more concerned. When one skin abscess looked particularly troublesome on his nose, she referred him to surgeon Dr. Wassim Mazraany to see if surgical intervention was needed.

Dr. Mazraany treated his infection and explained that morbid obesity (where a patient's body mass index ≥ 40 and needs to lose 100 pounds or more) not only leads to life-threatening diseases like heart disease and diabetes, but it also compromises the immune system. This would make him more susceptible to skin infections and boils. Scott listened carefully.

A few months later, he developed another infection and had to see Dr. Mazraany again for treatment. He decided then he had been through enough. His family history also weighed on his mind quite heavily; his dad had a heart attack at 55, and his brother had suffered a stroke.

“It was all about my quality of life,” said Strainge. “I’m only 54, and realized I was only about 10 years away from being dead. I have three children in their 20s, and a wonderful wife. Now was the time.”

According to the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program (MBSAQIP*), bariatric surgery results in significant weight loss and helps prevent, improve or resolve more than 40 obesity-related diseases or conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obstructive sleep apnea and certain cancers.

Dr. Mazraany notes that morbid obesity decreases life expectancy up to 25 years, and drives this point home to his patients.

“I ask them to think carefully about their decision to have surgery, but also give them some real-life examples to think about, too. I ask them to observe when they are in the grocery store to look around and check out all the elderly men and women in their 70s and 80s. How many of them are 300 pounds or more? None. Why? People 300 pounds or more rarely make it above 70.”

Strahinge was excited to start his weight loss journey, and met with the team at the Center for Weight Management and Bariatric Surgery in November 2019. He achieved his goal of an 18 pound weight loss and was scheduled for surgery in March.

And then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“Now just over a month later, his life has completely changed.

“I am now in the 250s – I haven’t seen this weight in 20 years! Even more incredible was how quickly my diabetes resolved. August 1st was the first day in eight years I didn’t have to inject myself with insulin. I’m off all my diabetes medications now, and was able to cut my blood pressure medication in half.”

Another bonus has been his improved sleep and increased energy. His wife and kids have expressed how much they love the “new him”.

“I spent so much time sick last year, and now my life has had such a radical shift. I’m not looking over my shoulder anymore worried about the grim reaper.”

To learn more about the weight loss options at the Center for Weight Management and Bariatric Surgery, visit www.lowellgeneral.org/weightloss.
I haven’t seen this weight in 20 years! Even more incredible was how quickly my diabetes resolved.
For individuals seeking a solution to obesity and a fresh start on life, every case is unique. Success requires a customized approach from a center with several treatment options.

That is why the Center for Weight Management and Bariatric Surgery at Lowell General Hospital has the most comprehensive program in the region, offering surgical and medical intervention while surrounding you with support at every step of your weight loss journey.

Physical and Emotional Support
For patients who are candidates for bariatric surgery, the Center for Weight Management provides access to a team of experienced surgeons who together have performed thousands of procedures.

But the Center’s broad treatment approach does not stop after surgery – patients undergo individual counseling, take part in support groups, body movement classes, and educational workshops that help them succeed with lifelong weight loss.

Paul O’Brien, PhD, is a psychologist who provides evaluation, support and short-term mental health counseling for patients in the program. “We see a lot of patients with anxiety and depression, and it’s very common to use food to avoid these feelings,” he says. “A big part of what we do is to help people make the connection between emotions and eating, and help them move past the negative talk about why they overeat.”

Behavioral courses such as My Hungry Head and the Psychology of Eating are very popular. And although in-person groups and exercise classes are temporarily suspended with COVID-19 restrictions, the team uses virtual meetings to keep patients on track.

O’Brien says the patients that are the most successful are those who make the major lifestyle changes to fill the void with other hobbies and activities to make them happy.

“Weight loss surgery creates an opportunity, and people are more willing to do things that they wouldn’t do in the past, like going to the beach or traveling on an airplane. New and improved relationships are also a big benefit of weight loss and patients really look forward to that.”

New non-surgical options
Patients who do not qualify for weight loss surgery and struggle with losing 20 pounds or more can still access the comprehensive support services and clinical expertise of staff with a non-surgical approach through the Center’s new Medical Weight Loss Program.

Led by Dr. Supriya Rao, a gastroenterologist who specializes in obesity medicine, the program takes a similar comprehensive approach. Dr. Rao stresses to patients that the program is not a diet but a complete lifestyle overhaul to help them achieve their weight goal, and most importantly, live their healthiest lives.

“With a medically supervised program, we pay special attention to the lab tests that can reveal issues with cholesterol, fatty liver, electrolytes, blood sugar levels, abnormal heart rhythms, and thyroid hormones that may be impacting weight loss,” says Rao. “We also look at their entire medical history and evaluate work habits, sleep cycles, and activity levels.”

This deep dive into a patient’s history helps Dr. Rao develop a personalized plan to set them up for a lifetime of wellness. To ensure nutrition needs are met, registered dietitians meet with patients regularly to assist with meal planning and portion control. If needed, weight loss medications and meal replacement options are available to help jump-start success.

“Weight loss is definitely not a one size fits all approach,” says Rao. “Accountability and regular appointments help patients maintain their loss. Patients often tell us they have struggled with the same 30 or 40 pounds their whole life, and we give them the tools to lose the weight and keep it off.”

For more information on how we can help you reach your weight loss goals and start a new life, visit www.lowellgeneral.org/weightloss.
Virtual Appointments and Safety Measures
You are Safe with Us. We have taken extensive safety precautions at all our facilities to ensure we keep our patients and staff safe, including:

- Staff and patient screening
- Increased cleaning and disinfection processes
- Telemedicine and videoconference visits
- Enhanced check-in processes
- Reduced capacity in waiting rooms to support social distancing

Expanded COVID-19 Testing Services
- New drive-thru testing center at our Tewksbury location (appointment required).
- Testing at ALL urgent care locations by appointment for those who are sick, have had an exposure, or need to meet out-of-state travel requirements.
- Innovative COVID-19 programs for local businesses and municipalities:
  - Return to work clearance and testing
  - N95 mask fit testing
  - Educational/support services for employees, and more

As Massachusetts reopens, the needs of our residents, area businesses, and local municipalities continually evolve. At Circle Health Urgent Care, our commitment to providing care and services to meet these needs has never been more important.

To make an appointment for COVID-19 testing or for other urgent, non-life-threatening medical needs call one of our four Urgent Care locations:

Billerica 978-323-2850
Dracut 978-459-2273
Tewksbury 978-323-5945
Westford 978-323-0302

Learn more about COVID-19 testing and services at www.circle-health.org/covidtesting.
How common are mental health challenges in the patients you see?
Unfortunately, what we’ve learned is depression and anxiety come hand in hand with diabetes. More than half of our patients with diabetes have anxiety or depression as well.

How has the pandemic magnified these issues?
The state of the world right now can bring a lot of anxiety and feelings of uncertainty to patients. An additional concern is that diabetes is also a risk factor for more serious complications from COVID-19. Many have had to reassess whether to continue working at a job they are at or do activities they like to do. These safety concerns become significant challenges to managing their diabetes.

How significant is mental health to an individual’s ability to manage the disease?
It can be one of the biggest challenges we face. Mental health conditions have become a barrier for patients to self-manage and work on their disease. We see it play out over and over again – patients lose their motivation to stay physically active and stick with their dietary needs. When patients lack a support system, it becomes even more of an issue.

What do you do to assess a patient’s mental well-being?
When we see patients for a new visit, we screen for depression and inquire about anxiety and the patient’s living situation. We also ask what they think about their diagnosis and how they are coping. These kinds of questions are very important. Then we work with them and monitor whether there is an improvement in their blood sugars.

How is the center keeping patients safe during the pandemic?
From the very beginning we’ve been working to stay available to all of our patients. Initially it was by phone, but soon thereafter we started doing face to face appointments with all of the proper COVID-19 precautions so they could see us. And we are bringing back our support groups in a virtual way, because we know how important that can be for patients who may feel isolated or on their own.

To determine if you are at risk for diabetes, or learn more about how the Diabetes and Endocrine Center at Circle Health Dracut can help you, visit www.diabetesandendocrinecenter.com.
Lowell General Hospital and Circle Health Offer Virtual Classes and Support Groups

While we are currently unable to offer in-person classes due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have moved many of our education and support groups to an online format to help our patients feel connected and prepared. Whether you are having a baby, surgery to replace a knee or hip, managing diabetes, or need some extra support while you are having cancer treatment, the following classes and support groups are available.

For a full description or to register for these and other programs, classes and support groups, please visit www.lowellgeneral.org/health or call 1-877-LGH-WELL (1-877-544-9355).

Getting Ready for Baby

Online Prepared Childbirth
$125 (may be reimbursed by insurance, check with your carrier)
You’ll learn all about the birth process and medical procedures through instructive video clips, animations, and interactive games. You’ll also get a sense of what labor is really like as you watch several birth stories and have an opportunity to create your own birth plan. The course is self-paced and takes about 4-6 hours to complete in total. Registration is required.

Virtual Prenatal Breastfeeding Class
Monthly, dates vary, 6:00-8:30pm, FREE
An introduction for mothers-to-be about breastfeeding, infant positioning, proper latching, and other practical tips. We recommend mothers take this class 6-8 weeks prior to their due date, but can join anytime. Please register at www.lowellgeneral.org/breastfeedingclass.

New Moms Support Group
Tuesdays, 10:00am-12:00pm, FREE
This virtual support group is open to all moms up to a year after delivery, and not restricted to new moms. Come join us whether it is your first, second, third child, or more. Come with questions and concerns and meet other mothers and babies while still practicing your social distancing efforts. The New Moms Support Group is run by a Registered Nurse who is also a Certified Lactation Consultant. Registration is not required. Visit www.lowellgeneral.org/newmomsupportgroup for Zoom link and instructions.

Take a Virtual Tour
Expectant parents can explore our labor and delivery and maternity units online at www.lowellgeneral.org/birthplacetour. Learn more about our family-centered care for new moms, spa-like amenities, and vast array of services at the Birthplace.

Telemmedicine Appointments Available in Most Specialties
Circle Health providers in a wide range of specialties from primary care, endocrinology, obstetrics, cardiology, urgent care and more are now offering virtual visits to support social distancing efforts. Check with your provider for details.

Cancer Support Groups

Breast Cancer Support Group
2nd Tuesday of the month, 6:00-7:30pm, FREE
Designed for current and newly diagnosed patients to share ideas, concerns and stories in a supportive environment. Led by Tina Stevens, staff member at The Cancer Center, who is also a breast cancer survivor. Family members, caregivers, and/or friends are welcome to join. For questions or to sign up, email Tina.Stevens@lowellgeneral.org or call 978-788-7132.

Prostate Cancer Support Group
2nd Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:00pm, FREE
This group offers fellowship, peer counseling, education and discussion regarding treatment options for newly diagnosed prostate cancer patients regardless of where they are seeking treatment. Significant others are encouraged to attend. For more information or to sign up for the group, please call 978-937-6142 or email Margaret.Lemire-Berthel@lowellgeneral.org.

Joint Replacement Education Classes

Joint Replacement Classes Meet Weekly or Monthly
Monthly classes meet on Mondays, November 2 and December 7, 4:00-5:00pm, FREE
Weekly classes meet on Mondays, October 19-December 21, 11:00am-12:00pm, FREE
This presentation by post-operative nurses, physical therapists, and nurse case managers will answer questions about preparing and recovering from total joint replacement surgery. Learn what to expect during their hospital stay, discharge planning, and the day-to-day recovery process. Patients and their support person are encouraged to attend prior to their scheduled surgery and will receive a Zoom link prior to class.

New! Visit our FREE Consumer Health Library
Do you have questions about fall allergies? Concerned about how you can keep your child’s anxieties under control this school year? Our online health library features current medical news, wellness and nutrition topics, quizzes, risk assessments, parenting tips, mental health topics, information on a variety of diseases and conditions, pediatric health topics, and much more. Visit www.circle-health.org/healthlibrary.
Throughout our pandemic response, our community has given emotional support to lift our spirits and donations to Help Us Heal. Together, there is no challenge we can’t meet.

If you would like to donate, visit www.lowellgeneral.org/donate.

THANK YOU