

# Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative

checkup



An eye toward prevention

A PUBLICATION FOR THE SUPPORTERS OF BVMI

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## Dear Friend...

We're here at last! I write this message to you from our new location on Essex Street. What an awesome sense of joy and hope I have, knowing how much BVMI can accomplish here.

As we settle into our larger, better-equipped facility, we'll be expanding our hours and welcoming new patients. Our volunteers and staff now have more space and privacy for patient interaction. What isn't changing is our commitment to offer high-quality care.

There is much to be happy about, but we still have serious problems to tackle. This issue of *Checkup* focuses on diabetes, which remains a critical health issue and one of the leading causes of death in New Jersey. We know that lower incomes correlate to higher rates of the disease. We also know that education, and early diagnosis and treatment, are our best weapons to fight it. The BVMI team is working hard to tame this disease among our patients who have it – and we're also working at preventing it whenever we can.

We welcome you to come and see how our new home will keep us moving forward to better health outcomes for the people we serve. We hope you'll join us for our Grand Opening on May 21st, but you don't have to wait. Come visit!

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## BVMI AND BD: On the same page



Alignment makes for a good partnership. BD and BVMI, while different in size and scope, share a solid piece of common ground.

"BVMI's mission – to provide free primary medical care and, where possible, referrals to specialty care for working, low-income Bergen County residents who have no health insurance – aligns perfectly with our company purpose of advancing the world of health." That's the view of Vincent A. Forlenza, Chairman, CEO & President of BD.

"We have proudly supported BVMI since its inception, with cash and product support, and BD is represented on the organization's Board," he adds. "BVMI has a profound impact in our community."

"BVMI's partnership with BD is one we hold dear, especially for our patients with diabetes," says Amanda Missey, BVMI President/CEO. "With BD's support for our Diabetes Care and Education Program, we can provide our patients with better diagnosis and care."

Ellen Rafferty, BD's Manager of Social Investing, sees alignment as well. "We are focused on supporting efforts that improve patient outcomes, and those that get at the root problems before they escalate," she says. "We've been pleased to see BVMI's growth over the years. We are also impressed with their new facility, which will enable them to expand their services and help more patients."



# checkup

## Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative

### LAUGHING, SMILING, AND FEELING GOOD AGAIN



BVMI's Certified Diabetes Educator, Holly Homa, RN-BC, CDE provides Annabelle with some tools for creating a healthier lifestyle.

## Driving on to better health

Working as a school bus driver brings Annabelle joy. When she first started working years ago, she didn't mind if she didn't have health insurance through her job. She didn't need insurance, or so she believed. After all, she was healthy! But as time went on, Annabelle developed Type II Diabetes and required medical care.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) initially helped Annabelle to buy health insurance, but eventually she couldn't afford the premiums and co-pays. She began to do some online research and discovered BVMI.

"Here was a place that would take care of me so that I could keep

going to the job that I love so dearly. It almost seemed too good to be true," said Annabelle. "And then, when I came here and saw how nice everyone is, I was floored. Being patient at BVMI feels like a dream."

"I can finally get the care I need," she added. "Diabetes education, GYN visits, social work appointments, podiatry exams, general care. And I finally got to see an eye doctor – something I haven't been able to do in three years! Also, I didn't know about pharmaceutical assistance before I came here. BVMI helps me get my diabetes medication for free, and that's a big help."

Prior to becoming a patient at BVMI, Annabelle was overwhelmed and stressed – her health was compromised, and it was exhausting. "If it wasn't for BVMI, I might have had to quit the job that I love so much – and I do love those kids. The thought of leaving them would break my heart," she said.

Now Annabelle is back to laughing, smiling, and feeling good again.

"It eases my mind knowing that BVMI is here – not only medically but also emotionally. Everyone has been so patient and kind and nice. BVMI is a godsend," she said.

### An eye toward prevention



Marsha Zolot and Charles Zolot, OD

"I'm just part of a generation that believes in giving back," says Dr. Charles Zolot, a Bergen County optometrist and BVMI volunteer. He sees the big picture when it comes to vision screening for people with diabetes, and provides exams for hundreds of our patients each year.

Dr. Zolot advocates a preventative approach to eye disease. "People with diabetes are prone to conditions such as macular degeneration," he explains. "Diabetes is also the leading cause of blindness in the US." Nearly 40% of BVMI's patients have diabetes or pre-diabetes, so early detection and treatment are critical.

The work Dr. Zolot does with BVMI is literally a family affair. Marsha Zolot, his wife of 47 years, is also his office manager and technician. She assists with all of BVMI's patients, and has even been known to provide a ride to the office if needed. Dr. Zolot is quick (and wise) to point out that he and Marsha work as a team. "We believe in treating our patients the way we would like to be treated," he says. "BVMI is providing a big service to people who really need and appreciate it. That's special."

## Did You Know?

### DIABETIC RETINOPATHY:

- IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF VISION LOSS AMONG PEOPLE WITH DIABETES
- IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF VISION IMPAIRMENT AND BLINDNESS AMONG WORKING-AGE ADULTS
- PEOPLE WITH ALL TYPES OF DIABETES ARE AT RISK
- EARLY STAGES USUALLY HAVE NO SYMPTOMS
- EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF BLINDNESS BY 95%