Tasha's baby came early. St. Mary's NICU was ready.

INSIDE:
5 outpatient services. One convenient location.
Enhancing quality care in rural communities.

Stroke Awareness Month
Feature Story:
Fast care saves Becky from lifelong disability
Georgia Neurological Surgery & Comprehensive Spine joins St. Mary's Medical Group

Georgia Neurological Surgery & Comprehensive Spine, a practice offering surgical and non-surgical care of the brain, spine and peripheral nervous system, is now part of St. Mary's Medical Group.

Georgia Neurological Surgery & Comprehensive Spine (GNS) joined the medical group on March 1, 2019. The practice provides quality neurosurgical care to patients across Northeast Georgia.

The team of experienced, fellowship-trained physicians and other healthcare professionals practice at GNS’s main office, 2142 West Broad St., Building 100, Suite 200, Athens, at satellite offices in Greensboro and Monroe, and will soon be consolidating their Demorest, Royston and Toccoa locations into a new Lavonia location to better serve the patients in that region of Northeast Georgia.

"In today's complex healthcare environment, joining St. Mary's Medical Group just makes sense for our practitioners and our patients," said Bryan Barnes, MD, a senior partner in the practice. "Being part of St. Mary's allows our physicians and other practitioners to devote more time to patient care and gives us enhanced access to educational resources, best practices, and administrative functions such as dealing with third-party payers."
“St. Mary’s has partnered with the physicians and staff at Georgia Neurological Surgery for decades to deliver state-of-the-art neurosurgical care to our community,” said Montez Carter, St. Mary’s President and CEO. “We are honored and extremely proud to welcome GNS into the St. Mary’s family. We look forward to expanding our partnership. Together, we will continue to enhance access to neurosurgical care across our region for decades to come.”

One recent example of that partnership, Carter said, was bringing neurointerventional biplane angiography to Northeast Georgia. One of the advanced capabilities of the system is the removal of the large vessel blood clots that cause many major strokes. Because this capability is now available at St. Mary’s, many patients are able to receive life-saving stroke treatment locally, rather than having to be transferred to hospitals in Atlanta or Augusta.

“It took St. Mary’s and GNS working together to make this level of care possible,” Carter said. “Together, we were able to acquire the technology – which is rarely found outside of major urban referral centers – recruit a highly trained specialist to Athens, and train the support team required to perform procedures such as minimally invasive aneurysm repair and mechanical blood clot extraction.”

“St. Mary’s Medical Group continues to grow to better meet the health care needs of all the communities we serve,” said Brittainy Horne, St. Mary’s Vice President of Professional and Physician Services. “The addition of Georgia Neurological Surgery and Comprehensive Spine is a tremendous development in our neurological and surgical continuum of care.”

GNS physicians are all board-certified or board-eligible and have completed extensive and specialized training in their respective fields. They are: John Cuff, MD, who co-founded the practice in 1979; Bryan Barnes, MD; Harlan Bruner, MD; and M. Neil Woodall, MD.

In addition to surgical services, the practice offers on-site physical therapy services for non-surgical care of a variety of conditions, especially back and neck pain. Also, a compassionate and highly qualified staff of physician assistants, a nurse practitioner, and registered nurses provide patient care under the supervision of the physicians, including developing initial treatment plans, ordering studies, and following patients’ progress.

Existing patients of GNS can continue to see physicians and other practitioners with no interruption of care. New patient appointments also are available. As part of St. Mary’s Medical Group, Georgia Neurological Surgery & Comprehensive Spine will accept most major insurance plans, Medicare and Medicaid, and will offer financial assistance to patients who qualify.

To schedule an appointment, call 706-548-6881. For more information, visit www.georgianeuro.com.

Opposite: The physicians of Georgia Neurological Surgery & Comprehensive Spine. From left to right: Bryan Barnes, MD; John Cuff, MD; Neil Woodall, MD; and Harlan Bruner, MD.

Below: Partnering with GNS and Neil Woodall, MD, St. Mary’s in 2018 introduced mechanical thrombectomy for stroke treatment to Northeast Georgia. The minimally invasive system can physically remove the large-vessel blood clots that cause many serious strokes. Here, Dr. Woodall poses with St. Mary’s interventional radiology team with the biplane system used to perform the procedure.
Expanding access to care
St. Mary's Medical Group brings advanced care closer to home across the region

When people who live in rural areas need specialized medical care, the only option often is to drive an hour or more to an urban hospital. St. Mary's Medical Group is working hard to bring physicians to rural communities so patients can get the care they need close to home.

Expanding cardiac services

Cardiology is a life-saving specialty rarely found in rural areas. Now, St. Mary's Medical Group and Oconee Heart & Vascular Center are bringing cardiac specialists to all the counties served by St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital in Greensboro and St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital in Lavonia.

Cardiologist John Layher, MD, is practicing full-time at the OHVC office in Greene County while cardiologist L. Steven Lowman, M.D., a native of Stephens County, is practicing full time at the OHVC office in Franklin County.

Cardiology services available include heart disease prevention, heart failure management, post-heart attack care, blood pressure management, and more. They also provide inpatient consultations so that more patients can stay in their local hospital, and provide services such as stress testing, nuclear medicine, echocardiogram studies and cardiac CT.

Having a cardiologist in the community full-time is especially important for people whose condition requires close monitoring. Such monitoring may prevent life-threatening complications and hospitalizations while improving quality of life.

Meet Dr. Layher

Dr. Layher is board-certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine in cardiovascular disease and holds numerous subspecialty certifications, including nuclear cardiology, echocardiography, cardiac CT imaging, and pacemaker and defibrillator placement. He received his medical degree from Indiana University School of Medicine, served his internal medicine residency at Indiana University School of Medicine’s Krannert Institute of Cardiology, and completed his cardiology fellowship at Indiana University School of Medicine’s Krannert Institute of Cardiology.

The OHVC Greene County office is located at 355 Clear Creek Parkway, Suite 1008, Lavonia. 706.389.3440.

Learn more about OHVC at www.oconeeheart.com

Meet Dr. Lowman

Dr. Lowman is board-certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine in cardiovascular disease and holds a subspecialty certification in nuclear cardiology. He received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Georgia, his medical degree from the Medical College of Georgia, completed his internship in internal medicine at the University of Kentucky and served his internal medicine residency at MCG. Dr. Lowman was employed as an internist with the Toccoa Clinic until he returned to MCG for his cardiology fellowship, which he completed in 2002.

The OHVC Franklin County office is located at 355 Clear Creek Parkway, Suite 1008, Lavonia. 706.389.3440.
General surgery at Sacred Heart

Athens General and Colorectal Surgeons, a St. Mary’s Medical Group practice, has expanded surgical services at St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital. Surgeons are now available for scheduled and emergency procedures during the day, Monday through Friday.

Care is provided by general surgeons Steve Shirley, MD, a native of Franklin County, and Sergio Mejias, MD, who alternates weeks with Dr. Shirley.

Together, they provide emergency and elective surgical services for conditions affecting the breast, thyroid, esophagus, stomach, gallbladder, appendix, and colon, among others. They also provide hernia repair, colonoscopy and upper endoscopy services, as well as the surgical treatment of hemorrhoids.

Both surgeons are board certified and together have more than 50 years of experience in traditional and minimally invasive procedures. Both earned their medical degrees and completed their residencies and surgical fellowships at Augusta University/Medical College of Georgia.

AGCS’s Lavonia office is located in the Sacred Heart Medical Services Building at 367 Clear Creek Parkway, Suite 1007. 706.548.5488. www.athensgeneralsurgeons.com.

Pictured: Drs. Sergio Mejias (left) and Steve Shirley.

Welcome, Dr. Richard White

Richard White III, MD, a longtime obstetrician and gynecologist serving the greater Franklin County area, has joined Clear Creek OB/GYN and James Bauerband, MD. The practice is part of St. Mary’s Medical Group and delivers babies at Sacred Heart Hospital.

A native of Chattanooga, Tenn., Dr. White earned his medical degree from Baylor College School of Medicine in Houston, Texas, and completed his residency in OB/GYN at Emory University Affiliated Hospitals in Atlanta. He has been practicing in Northeast Georgia since 1998. He is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Clear Creek OB/GYN is located at 355 Clear Creek Parkway, Suite 1004, Lavonia. 706.356.0780. www.clearcreekobgyn.com

1st pacemaker implanted at St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital

Cardiologist John Layher, MD, second from right, celebrates with the OR team at St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital after the hospital’s first-ever pacemaker implantation on March 15. Pacemakers can help improve quality and length of life for patients with abnormally slow heart rates. The procedure is part of the growing continuum of care being created by St. Mary’s to better meet the needs of patients all across Northeast Georgia.

Pictured with Dr. Layher are, from left to right: Sheila Hull, Lisa Byrd, Camille Scoggins, Diane Bracewell and Marie Wells. Not pictured: Laura Larrieu.

“His expansion of our services brings quality care closer to patients in the communities we serve. More patients can receive the care they need with less travel and less time away from work or family.”

- Brittainy Horne, Vice President, Strategy & Ambulatory Services
You have to have HEART

Contributions to Sacred Heart, Good Samaritan hospitals qualify for state tax credit program

Did you know that contributions to designated rural hospitals in Georgia may entitle you to a 100 percent credit on your state taxes?

Did you know that St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital in Lavaonia and St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital in Greensboro are among the hospitals qualifying for the rural tax credit program?

Under the Georgia HEART program for rural hospitals, taxpayers receive 100 percent credit on their state taxes for contributions of up to $5,000 for individuals and $10,000 for married couples. Pass-through entities such as corporations can also receive credit for 100 percent of the amount contributed, up to $10,000 or 75 percent of the corporation or trust’s income tax liability, so long as they would have paid Georgia income tax in that amount on their share of taxable income.

In addition, those who itemize on their federal income tax returns can claim Georgia HEART contributions as charitable deductions.

“We are very pleased that Georgia lawmakers understand the importance of our rural hospitals to the communities we serve and the vital need for this innovative program,” said Montez Carter, President and CEO of St. Mary’s Health Care System. “These contributions help us enhance access to vital health care services in areas where people otherwise would have to travel long distances to reach the care they need.”

St. Mary’s is using contributions to Good Samaritan and Sacred Heart hospitals to:

- Maintain the facilities in excellent condition and allow for growth to meet their community’s changing needs
- Continue to acquire modern new technology to provide state-of-the-art services locally
- Continue to build access to services not routinely found in rural communities, such as 3D mammography and, in the year ahead, cardiac-capable CT
- Support the growing demands of both hospitals’ 24/7 Emergency Departments so that quality care is always available when time is critical
- Expand telemedicine capabilities so that the hospitals can connect patients to physician specialists through technology, reducing the need for transfers.

The program is designed to provide vital funding for rural hospitals in Georgia, many of which are facing major financial challenges. The law creates a pool of up to $60 million in tax credits for each year through 2021 – with each of 52 eligible hospitals having access to up to $4 million per year.

Good Samaritan Hospital President Tanya Adcock noted that there is a competitive element built into the law. Because of the $60 million limit on annual credits, people must act quickly to ensure the hospital they want to support doesn’t miss out.

“Tax credits are approved on a first-come, first-served basis, and when the overall cap is reached, the window of opportunity closes for that year,” Adcock said. “That’s why it’s important for people who want to help our hospitals to act as soon as possible. Once the state hits that $60 million cap, the program ends for this year.”
Sacred Heart Hospital President Jeff English also noted that each individual hospital potentially can receive up to $4 million per year. "That kind of money would be a tremendous shot in the arm for any hospital," he said, "but since there are 52 eligible hospitals and a $60 million total cap, only a few hospitals can reach that level, and many hospitals will receive a lot less."

Here’s how it works: Say a married couple with a tax liability of $15,000 wants to contribute the maximum amount: $10,000.

• First, they apply through the Georgia HEART website at www.georgiaheart.org. They can also find projections of the tax effects and possible savings at https://tinyurl.com/RH0taxeffect.
• They designate which hospital they want to support.
• Georgia HEART handles getting approval from the Department of Revenue.
• If their application is approved, they make their contribution directly to the hospital.
• The state credits 100 percent of the value of their contribution against the state taxes they owe.

The credit doesn’t increase or reduce your income tax liability, but the program tells the state that you want your taxes to support the hospital you choose," English said.

Any Georgia taxpayer can contribute to any eligible hospital, so contributions to Sacred Heart and Good Samaritan could come from anyone, anywhere, who owes Georgia income taxes.

"Part of the idea of the legislation is that people in cities like Atlanta, Athens and Augusta will step up to help hospitals in smaller communities, especially if they have connections there such as family, friends or vacation destinations," English said.

To find out more, visit Georgia HEART at www.georgiaheart.org.

For information about contributing to
• Sacred Heart Hospital, contact Lauren Papka at 706.356.7800 or lpapka@stmaryssacredheart.org.
• Good Samaritan Hospital, contact Beth Patrick at 706.453.5187 or epatrick@stmarysgoodsam.org.

Contributions to Georgia HEART are helping rural hospitals such as St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital and St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital acquire modern technology and attract and retain the staff and physicians needed to operate them. Here, staff and physicians pose with Sacred Heart’s 64-slice CT scanner.

Telehealth technology, such as this REACH telestroke system at St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital, can connect physicians in rural hospitals with specialists in urban centers 24/7. Supported by contributions made through Georgia HEART, these systems reduce the need for transfers and allow more patients to receive the care they need locally.

St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital
On-again, off-again stroke

St. Mary's fights to save nurse with irregular symptoms

Becky Beasley has been a nurse for 40 years. She works in the stress lab at St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital, helping patients find out if they have blood vessel problems that could cause a heart attack.

So when she had signs of a stroke, she knew exactly what was going on. She didn’t know how unusual her symptoms would turn out to be, or if she would ever recover.

**Fast action. Many questions.**

Stroke is a medical emergency. It’s like a heart attack in the brain. Blood flow to part of the brain becomes blocked, most often by a blood clot, and brain tissue begins dying at a rate of up to 2 million brain cells per minute.

Symptoms come on suddenly and can include weakness, especially on one side of the body; trouble speaking or swallowing; trouble seeing; confusion; dizziness, or a terrible headache. Here’s a simple test to determine if someone needs emergency care: Think FAST: Face drooping? Arm weak? Speech slurred? Time to call 911!

Becky lives on a tree farm near the South Carolina line. To save time, her family drove her to the emergency department at Sacred Heart Hospital. The physician on duty, Dr. Morgan Wood, quickly determined that she needed to be rushed to the primary stroke center at St. Mary’s Hospital in Athens.

Franklin County EMS transported her while St. Mary’s prepared for her arrival. Neurohospitalist Alan Morgan, MD, and stroke coordinator Joanne Lockamy joined the emergency department physicians and nurses to facilitate care.

But an odd thing happened en route: her symptoms vanished.

"When they took me out of the ambulance, I said, 'I'm well. I can go home!'" Becky says.

Dr. Morgan suspected she was still in danger and recommended she stay for testing. She agreed. Powerful diagnostic imaging was inconclusive for a blood clot but showed she had no internal bleeding. That meant it would be safe to give her the clot-busting drug Alteplase if her symptoms returned.

They did. St. Mary’s stroke team sprang into action, but a few minutes later, her symptoms vanished again.

**Treatment and success**

For eight hours, her symptoms came and went. Finally, Dr. Morgan advised that the best option was to try Alteplase, which might still be effective at this stage because her symptoms had
been so intermittent. He also called in Neil Woodall, MD, a neurosurgeon who provides mechanical thrombectomy services at St. Mary’s. Mechanical thrombectomy can physically remove blockages in large blood vessels. St. Mary’s is one of only a few community hospitals in the nation with the capability.

Dr. Woodall performed a cerebral angiogram to take a closer look at the blood vessels in Becky’s brain and found one was narrowed. However, the Alteplase was working. Hour by hour, function returned as blood vessels reopened. As the process unfolded, Becky’s care team kept a close watch on her in the Neuroscience Critical Care Unit. A few days later, she was discharged to a rehabilitation program. Three days after that, she went home.

"Now I’m fine," she says. "I can move all my extremities, think, talk, and swallow. I was back at work five weeks later, almost like nothing had happened."

The 68-year-old nurse admits she slowed down a little. "I semi-retired: I quit my second job as an on-call hospice nurse. I want to spend more time with my family."

Her family includes two grandchildren in Lavonia ("I spend a lot of time at the baseball field"), two grandchildren in Charleston, S.C. ("The best reason to visit the coast"), her husband, George, who is a professional fishing guide ("I go with him to Canada every summer"), and her dog, Joe.

"All the time I was in the ambulance, all I could think of was, 'Who’s with my dog? I was afraid I’d never be able to walk with him or run with him anymore," Becky says. "Stroke can take everything away. St. Mary’s saved my life. They were wonderful."

St. Mary's Stroke Services

St. Mary's Hospital in Athens
Is certified by the Joint Commission as a Primary Stroke Center, with powerful diagnostics, a neurohospitalist team, REACH telestroke consultations, Alteplase, mechanical thrombectomy when Dr. Woodall is available, neuroscience nursing and critical care units, the region’s only inpatient rehabilitation center, home health care/hospice services, outpatient rehabilitation, Georgia Neurological Surgery and Comprehensive Spine, and St. Mary’s Neurological Specialists.

St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital in Lavonia
Provides emergency stroke care with Alteplase capability and REACH telestroke consultations, 64-slice CT imaging, critical care services, inpatient nursing, and inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation.

St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital in Greensboro
Provides emergency stroke care with Alteplase capability and REACH telestroke consultations, 64-slice CT imaging, inpatient nursing, and rehabilitation services, including a swing bed program for patients who need inpatient rehabilitation after discharge from acute care.

For details, visit www.stmarysathens.org.
An unexpected blessing
St. Mary's NICU eases a family's worries

By Nicolette Sariotis, Marketing Intern

Tasha and Jay Barton were expecting to welcome their second child on Jan. 27, 2019. Their older daughter, 8-year-old Evva, was also born at St. Mary’s and was excited for her soon-to-be little brother or sister. She enjoyed going to all of the doctor’s appointments and prayed each night that the baby would come a few days early so that they could share her birthday on Jan. 16.

Nobody expected the baby to come a whole 10 weeks early.

The Barton family resides just outside of Hartwell, Ga., about an hour's drive from St. Mary’s. Tasha went to all her routine checkups and experienced no complications during the pregnancy. She and her doctor even laughed that the baby must be reading the textbook because everything was right on schedule.

That fall was an exciting time for the Bartons. Not only were they awaiting the arrival of their new baby, they also bought the perfect home for their family on Nov. 2. It needed some work, but they were not worried because they thought they had plenty of time.

Then, on Monday, Nov. 19, Tasha began experiencing what felt like contractions. She called her doctor, Kaushik Shah, MD, at around 8 a.m. and, at his urging, had her mother drive her and Evva to St. Mary’s. Tasha was quickly admitted. She recalls one nurse saying, “Any amount of time we can keep the baby in is better.” But, despite the efforts of the staff, Tasha’s contractions continued to strengthen. At around 5 p.m., the staff called Jay and he rushed to the hospital.

Compassionate care in a difficult time

“We were nervous because we knew it was too soon, and shocked because there were no warning signs at all,” Tasha says. She laughs as she recalls Evva saying, “The baby can’t come today; it’s not my birthday!”

Even though the Bartons were nervous that their second child was arriving so soon, they knew they were in good hands. Jay, Evva, and Tasha’s mother were all present to experience the birth
of Delina Barton on Nov. 19 at 9:18 p.m., weighing just 3 pounds and 5 ounces.

Immediately after Delina’s birth, Tasha was able to hold her for a few precious moments, then staff took the tiny infant upstairs to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Being so small, she needed specialized care in order to get warm, digest food, and stay safe from germs.

Delina would remain in the NICU for six weeks and four days. Tasha made the two-hour round trip to St. Mary’s each day to be with her daughter.

“There was never a time when we felt we weren’t being taken care of or updated,” Tasha says. With eight years between the births of her daughters, she adds, “I cannot think of anything negative about either experience.”

Homeward bound

Delina progressed well, but these were difficult times for Tasha. “Each day leaving the hospital without my baby was so hard, but I’ll say those nurses took care of her like she was their own baby,” Tasha says, her voice breaking with emotion. “That in itself is amazing. The staff loved my child as much as I did.”

Delina remained in the NICU through Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s. When Santa came to the NICU, Delina was wrapped in a red swaddle by the nurses and photographed for her first Christmas. Another nurse saved the first bottle that Delina drank out of and filled it with glitter. The gift embodies Delina’s growth and is a piece of her story that the family will always cherish.

After a long 46 days, Delina was discharged on what happened to be move in-day into the Barton’s new home. Tasha says she and Jay “felt like first-time parents again.” They asked countless questions because they knew they soon would have to do everything on their own.

“Each and every nurse was incredibly helpful each step of the way,” Tasha says. “Bringing Delina to our new home was a double blessing for us. It was a truly incredible experience that we will never forget.”

Today, Delina is doing wonderfully. She has not experienced any setbacks or complications and has gained more weight than the doctors had anticipated. As she has grown, so has the Bartons’ confidence that their youngest daughter is safe and thriving. Today, they are happily settling into their new home as a family of four.

About St. Mary’s NICU

When newborns and other infants need extra medical care, St. Mary’s NICU combines lifesaving technology with trained healthcare professionals to provide a specialized and compassionate healing environment.

Because it is directly attached to St. Mary’s Family Birth Center, St. Mary’s NICU allows families to stay close to their baby in the days after birth. Our trained medical staff attends every C-section and high-risk delivery. Parents have 24-hour access to the NICU and are an integral part of our family-centered approach to care.

Our team includes a neonatologist, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, respiratory and physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, social workers, lactation consultants and chaplains. When needed, care continues after discharge, too, often with the same providers the family came to know during their NICU stay.

For more information, visit www.stmarysathens.org.
Postcards from St. Mary's Outpatient Center

St. Mary's combines five outpatient services under one roof – in one convenient location – with easy access from our whole region and free parking. Your health is our mission.

Laboratory

When you need testing done, our outpatient collection center is staffed by the compassionate and experienced professionals you trust from St. Mary’s Hospital. You can choose where you get your lab work done. Doctor’s order required; be sure to ask if you need to be fasting! Open Monday-Friday, 7:30-12:30 and 1-4:30. Coumadin Clinic available by appointment. For information visit www.stmarysathens.org/services/clinical-laboratory or call 706.389.2389.

Radiology

When you need outpatient radiology, this is the place to go. 3D and 2D mammography with private dressing rooms. Digital radiography. MRI. High-speed CT. General and vascular ultrasound. Bone density scanning. Echocardiography. Compassionate professionals. Saturday appointments available for several types of studies, including mammography. Doctor’s order required. For information, go to www.stmarysathens.org/services/medical-imaging or call 706.289.2300.

Sleep Disorders Center

If you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or remaining awake, St. Mary’s Sleep Disorders Center provides state-of-the-art digital testing to help identify and treat your issues. Private suites with their own bathrooms. Queen-size beds. Care provided by Registered Polysomnographic Technologists. Testing available for ages 13 and up. Doctor’s order required. For more information, go to www.stmarysathens.org/services/sleep-disorders-center or call 706.389.3200.
Outpatient Rehabilitation

From children with developmental delays to adults recovering from back injuries, surgical procedures, strokes and more, St. Mary’s Outpatient Rehabilitation Center provides comprehensive physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech-language pathology services for all ages. We are committed to improving quality of life by reducing pain and maximizing function. Doctor’s order required. For information call 706.389.2950 or visit www.stmarysathens.org/services/outpatient-services/rehabilitation.

Wellness Center

St. Mary’s Wellness Center is open to the community and provides a clean, fully equipped gym that’s open 24/7, a variety of group fitness classes, massage, and personal training. Staff is friendly and knowledgeable and will work with you to meet your goals. Services feature medical wellness programs, including Cardiac Rehab Phase 3 and Supervised Exercise Programs. No annual contract required. Call 706.389.3355 or visit www.stmarysathens.org/services/wellness-center.
Support Groups

Breastfeeding? Living with a chronic illness? These free groups can help.

St. Mary’s offers a range of support groups to empower people to live better through education and emotional support. All groups are free and open to patients, caregivers and others who are interested. Call the numbers listed for more information or to register.

St. Mary’s Hospital
1230 Baxter St., Athens

Better Breathers Club
• 3rd Thursday, 11 AM - 12 PM, Private Dining Room
• Meetings seek to empower those living with chronic lung conditions by teaching better coping mechanisms through continual support, education, and social connection. A trained facilitator leads each session. 706.389.3227

Bundles of Joy Breastfeeding Support Group
• Every Monday 1-3 PM, Flower Suites or Assembly Room A
• Mothers can learn from each other and an international board-certified lactation consultant, weigh their babies before and after breastfeeding, and monitor the baby’s advancement from week to week. Confirm meeting room at lobby upon arrival. 706.389.3389

Diabetes Support Group
• 1st Tuesday, 3-4:30 PM, Private Dining Room
• Provides information and emotional support for people with diabetes as well as their family members and caregivers. Contact the Diabetes Education Department at 706.389.2060

Life After Loss Bereavement Support Group
• 1st, 3rd, and 5th Thursday of each month, 7-8 PM, Lobby Conference Room
• Designed to help those who are experiencing the loss of a loved one by expressing feelings and finding support among others facing a similar loss. The group is facilitated by Jessica Chicken, a critical care and palliative care chaplain. 706.389.3426

Stroke Support Group
• 2nd Tuesdays, 12-1 PM, Assembly Rooms
• Participants gain information from invited guest speakers and share their own experiences in a supportive, small-group setting. Facilitated by members of St. Mary’s stroke team. Especially geared to the needs of stroke survivors and their caregivers. 706.389.2150

Toddle Time
• Every Thursday, 10:30 AM-12 PM, Assembly Room A
• Weekly group offers an engaging space for toddlers to play and participate in activities while moms connect with other moms. Second-time moms can breastfeed, weigh, and spend time with their newborn while their toddlers play. First-time moms welcome, too! 706.389.3389

Breastfeeding? Living with a chronic illness? These free groups can help.
St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital
367 Clear Creek Parkway, Lavonia

Better Breathers Club
• 2nd Tuesday, 1-2 PM, Small Conference Room across from the Café
• Led by a trained professional, participants learn ways to better cope with lung disease while getting the support of others in similar situations. Contact David Lyerly, jlyerly@stmaryssacredheart.org, 706.356.7893

Matter of Balance
• Wednesdays, Oct. 2 – Nov. 20, 1:30-3:30 PM, Large Conference Room
• This fun, interactive 8-week class is designed to increase strength and balance, reduce the fear of falling, increase activity levels and educate participants on how to reduce risk and remain independent. Contact Lisa Howard at 770.538.2711 to register.

Diabetes Support Group
• 1st Tuesday, 3-4 PM in the Large Conference Room
• For anyone who has been diagnosed with diabetes as well as family members or others who provide care to a loved one with diabetes. For information please contact Alex Lundy at 706.389.3424 or alundy@stmaryssacredheart.org.

Diabetes Empowerment Education Program
• Tuesdays, June 4-July 16, 2:30-4:30 PM, Large Conference Room
• Free, fun, hands-on course for people diagnosed with any type of diabetes or pre-diabetes. Learn coping strategies that can improve quality and length of life from professionals and other participants. Contact Karen Villaroel, 678.527.3441 to register.

St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital
5401 Lake Oconee Parkway, Greensboro

Better Breathers Club
• 2nd Friday, 12-1 PM, Good Samaritan Hospital
• Each meeting offers support for adults with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma and other chronic lung diseases. Participants will learn skills that help manage their condition and improve their quality of life. For more information, please call 706.453.7331.

St. Mary’s Highland Hills Village
1660 Jennings Mills Road, Watkinsville

Living with Memory Loss
• 1st Thursday, 6-7 PM, Main Building Conference Room
• Meetings provide information and inspiration for loved ones and caregivers of people living with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. Trained facilitators guide discussions to create a safe, open atmosphere in which participants can express concerns and ask questions in a supportive environment. RSVP by calling 706.353.8840.

Opposite: Support group meetings provide a speaker as well as ample time for participants to share their own experiences. Here, certified diabetes educator Cheryl Elder demonstrates how excess blood sugar levels can lead to serious complications.

Below: St. Mary’s Support Groups provide social connections as well as information. Here, the Better Breathers Club at St. Mary’s Good Samaritan Hospital celebrates the Christmas season.
Shop for a cause

St. Mary’s Auxiliary Thrift Store specializes in gently used fine merchandise in a friendly atmosphere. Generous donors keep the shop stocked with women's and men's clothing, housewares, books, small appliances, electronics, pictures and frames, and more. The store is operated entirely by volunteers from St. Mary’s Auxiliary, with all proceeds above expenses going to support St. Mary’s services and healing mission – more than $1 million since the store’s founding in 2008. Shoppers (and donors!) are welcome anytime the store is open.

Recipient of the 2018 Community of Conscience Outreach Award from the Georgia Hospital Association Council on Auxiliaries/Volunteers and 2019 Athens Area Human Relations Council Community Service Award.

2156 W. Broad St., Athens, next to St. Mary's Broad Street entrance

Open: 10 am – 5 pm Tuesday-Friday
and 11 am – 3 pm Saturday
Closed: Sunday, Monday, and holidays

706.389.2772

www.stmarysathens.org/patients-visitors/thrift-store