

UVA Health Named to ‘Top Places to Work in Healthcare’ List

By Eric Swensen

National healthcare publication Becker’s Hospital Review has named UVA Health to its 2024 list of “150 top places to work in healthcare.”

“This list highlights hospitals, health systems, and healthcare companies that prioritize workplace excellence and the happiness, satisfaction, well-being, and fulfillment of their employees,” Becker’s said in its introduction to this year’s honorees. “These organizations offer robust benefits packages, professional and personal development opportunities, diverse work environments, and the resources necessary for work-life balance. When employees feel respected and cared for, their organizations thrive — and these companies are prime examples of this golden rule.”

The publication lauded UVA Health for a turnover rate below the national average for health systems and for launching a 10-year strategic plan for continued success in the years ahead.

“As a public institution, the system works as an engine for good within the state, advancing innovation, economic growth, clinical care, and research for the benefit of patients and employees alike,” Becker’s said.

Examples of how UVA Health works to support its team members include:

- **Wisdom & Well-being program:** This nationally recognized program provides healthcare workers and students with the tools and knowledge to identify and treat “stress injuries” caused by the day-to-day challenges they face, with the goal of reducing burnout, mental illness, and attrition.
- **Earn While You Learn:** This program provides residents in the Charlottesville area with the opportunity to build a healthcare career through paid, on-the-job training in partnership with Piedmont Virginia Community College.
- **Leadership Academy:** Developed as part of UVA Health’s strategic plan, the academy welcomed its first group of more than 30 participants in November with the goal of developing leaders from within the health system.

“The greatest strength of UVA Health is our people, and we want our health system to be a destination for talented students, staff, researchers, and care providers to build their careers,” said K. Craig Kent, MD, Chief Executive Officer of UVA Health and Executive Vice President for Health Affairs at the University of Virginia. “We seek to become the best place to work, and we are honored to see our efforts recognized by Becker’s Hospital Review.”



Making a Difference

By K. Craig Kent, MD
Chief Executive Officer, UVA Health

What makes somewhere a great place to work?

Is it the organization’s values? Yes. Is it the potential for career development and growth? Yes. Is it having a strong supervisor who supports you in your career? Most definitely.

Many factors contribute to making an organization a best place to work, and the list often depends on each individual and their unique role. However, there is one thing that seems universally important to all of us: Knowing you are making a difference in the lives of our patients.

As Chief Executive Officer of UVA Health, I have the immense pleasure of leading an organization where making a difference is something we do every single day. Our talented and dedicated team members deliver outstanding care to patients, lead cutting-edge research, and expertly educate the next generation of extraordinary clinicians and physician-scientists. All of our team members are invested in making a difference for both the communities we serve and for each other. As I visit different areas of our health system, I am continually impressed by the dedication and compassion that permeates our culture. Each one of our nearly 18,000 team members is important to our missions of clinical care, research, education, and community.

*In this issue of ASPIRE, you will read stories about how we are all making that difference. I hope you will see our collective pride come to life. I am proud of the impact we are having and of the strides we have made on our journey to become a **workplace of choice**.*

To all of you reading this: Thank you for contributing in the many ways you do to make UVA Health incredible. Your work has a profound impact on the lives of those we serve, and I am proud to work at your side.

RN to BSN Students ‘Buddy Up’ With Peer Mentors

By Christine Kueter

Yvonne Cruz (RN to BSN '25) didn't always enjoy going to work.

Though a cardiac tech in an ICU for a decade, when she became an RN on the same unit last summer, a colleague chafed at Cruz's promotion. Cruz found herself balancing her UVA courses, her clinical work, her family — and a challenging peer.

She turned first to Mark Benedict (RN to BSN '24), a neurological nurse and classmate, her assigned mentor.

"It was therapeutic, laying out the story, considering my resources, and finding a solution," Cruz said.

Benedict, she said, helped her reset.

"He was like my voice of reason while everything was chaotic. It wasn't really like talking to mentor — it was like talking to a friend. It also made me realize, 'Oh, I really do need to talk to my boss, to HR, to my professors. There are resources available—use them.'"

Peers have always been informal sources of support for nurses who return to school. But thanks to Assistant Professor Crystal Toll, every RN to BSN student now enjoys a formally assigned mentor during the two-year program as well, thanks to a new pilot "buddy" system that students at

the program's three sites (Charlottesville, Fairfax, and Richmond) are raving about.

The idea was sparked when Toll observed her Richmond students' "outsider" status.

"They weren't quite satisfied, or engaged, and lacked a sense of really belonging in the School, and to the program," Toll said. "I heard how nervous they were, how they didn't know how they'd balance the work-life thing, and how they wondered out loud about the people who'd walked in their shoes before they did."

Toll first suggested focus groups and surveys, to the laughter and groans of her students, who, she realized, "didn't want to add anything extra to their plates. So that spiraled into the idea, 'Well, what if it wasn't extra? What if it was part of the program?'"

Fast forward nearly two years and the mentor-mentee program is part of the RN to BSN fabric. Practiced skills and concepts are mapped to course objectives (first years' Foundations course and second years' Leadership course). Toll even earned a \$20,000 grant to upgrade the matching software students use.

Each month, mentor-mentee pairs take part in guided conversations: about work, on-unit safety, and how they cope with



Pictured: RN to BSN Student Mark Benedict; Dean Marianne Baernholdt; RN to BSN student Kaitlyn Niesent (BSN '24); and DNP student Joshua Moore (BSN '17, MSN '20).

the "heaviness" of navigating work with people affected by critical illness.

"It's especially important for nurses," explained Benedict, a former nurse's assistant at a Chesapeake community hospital emergency room, whose first mentor was a UVA Health wound care nurse, "because we're at the pointy edge of healthcare: we see a lot, we do a lot, and I think it's made to help everyone academically, but also in other ways."

Acting as a mentor also gives students like Kaitlyn Niesent (RN to BSN '24) a confidence boost.

"It's made me realize that other people are looking up to me, and that what I say matters to them," Niesent said.

Wisdom, Well-Being, and Peer Support Training Program By Elle Hogan

In the fast-paced, emotionally charged world of healthcare, team members' well-being is paramount, which is why UVA Health's Wisdom and Well-being team is now offering online and live training across the organization to help deliver on our promise "to care for, empower, and support our fellow team members in everything we do."

Wisdom, Well-being, and Peer Support Training (WWPST) provides a comprehensive approach to foster peer support skills in the healthcare workforce. Participants learn how to identify and reduce unnecessary stressors and how to improve resilience and communication skills. All UVA Health team members are invited to participate in this training program, which includes:

- **Basic Training: Introduction to the Wisdom and Well-being Approach.** The foundation of the WWPST program is the introductory online training, which focuses on core concepts and individual awareness. Participants earn 3.5 free continuing education credits.
- **Advanced: Workplace Peer Support Champions.** Peer Champion training is conducted live, via Zoom, or in person. The four-hour

champion training is typically done in two two-hour blocks, and participants receive 4.0 free continuing education credits.

- **Leadership Training.** Recognizing the pivotal role of leaders in driving cultural change, WWPST offers specialized training for leaders at all levels. Leaders are asked to complete the basic training modules prior to this training.

The WWPST program represents a holistic approach to enhancing the well-being of team members and fostering a supportive workplace culture at UVA Health. By empowering individuals, leaders, and teams with the skills and resources needed to navigate the challenges of the healthcare environment, WWPST will be instrumental in promoting resilience, preventing burnout, and ultimately improving patient outcomes.

Register and complete the basic online training today by visiting <https://wwpst.nursing.virginia.edu/>. For questions or additional information, email wwpst@virginia.edu.

UVA Health Prince William Medical Center Celebrates 60 Years as a Community Hospital

By Debbie Fleischer

As Prince William Medical Center embarks on its 60th year of caring for the greater Prince William County area, we asked UVA Community Health CEO Erik Shannon, longtime Auxiliary Volunteer and leader Ruth Simone, and Board Chair Steve Danziger about the significance of the milestone:

Erik Shannon, Chief Executive Officer, UVA Community Health

I am struck by the profound impact on our community, made possible by the past and present contributions of our dedicated staff. I wonder, did the nine ladies from the Women's Club of Manassas, who in 1961 formed the health committee that would later become the Auxiliary Volunteers, envision such a remarkable future? Could they have imagined these comprehensive services we have developed over the years?



- Level 3 neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)
- Comprehensive women's services and maternity care
- Behavioral health specialists (inpatient and outpatient)
- Outpatient surgery on campus
- Stroke and neurology specialists
- State-of-the-art blood services, including transfusions
- Heart and vascular care, new cardiac catheterization labs and rehab center
- Diagnostic imaging and interventional radiology
- Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy
- Wound care and hyperbaric oxygen therapy
- Chronic pain management specialists
- Diabetes treatment and programs
- Emergent Orthopedic/sports medicine specialist consults
- Sleep lab

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all who have contributed to our team's



success over the decades. Happy 60th anniversary!

Ruth Simone, Past Auxiliary President, 26-Year Volunteer

In 1961, nine women from the Women's Club of Manassas health committee in 1961 established the current day hospital auxiliary. Their dedication and initiative led to the first official meeting, which was attended by 44 women in late 1962 who became charter members known as The Pink Ladies.

The auxiliary formalized its structure in 1963, establishing bylaws, electing officers, and defining roles. This groundwork culminated in Prince William Hospital welcoming its first patient in June 1964. Soon the auxiliary was granted membership to the Virginia Association of Hospital Auxiliaries (VAHA). In 1965, they began welcoming young ladies aged 14 and 15 to volunteer as hospital candy strippers. The first young man joined in 1973, prompting a change from candy strippers to auxiliary volunteers.

The auxiliary evolved into a robust group that has raised more than \$6.8 million dollars, contributing to initiatives such as the birthing center, the plaza at Haymarket, the launch of the mammogram coach, a scholarship program for teen volunteers, COVID support, and more. They have volunteered over 2.2 million hours of service to the hospital.



Steve Danziger, Board Member

Reflecting on the whirlwind of changes the small independent hospital has undergone in the last 15 years, Steve marvels, "In the beginning, 60 years ago, it was such a small community hospital that the Board had keys to open the doors. We all truly appreciate the future of where this facility is going."

He adds, "When UVA Health came on board, it was magic. We turned a corner, and the doors are now wide open with more space, many more providers, the adoption of telemedicine activities, the integration of all facilities on one MyChart system, and new technology and equipment. All of these advancements are just the beginning of what I know will be an amazing future."

A particularly fond memory of community care was during the COVID pandemic. Steve organized the board to conduct a "thank you walk." Board members stationed at the facility's entrance expressed gratitude to everyone entering or leaving the hospital. "It was a truly special moment. With life back to normal now, we've returned to engaging with one of the most diverse populations in the country."

Many Community Hospital Milestones to Celebrate

As we honor Prince William Medical Center's rich 60-year history, UVA Health also ushered in a 10-year anniversary for Haymarket Medical Center in March of 2024. Next up, Culpeper Medical Center turns 65 in 2025.

UVA Health's W. Jeffrey Elias, MD, Named to Modern Healthcare's 2024 Innovators List

By Eric Swensen

UVA Health neurosurgeon W. Jeffrey Elias, MD, has been recognized by Modern Healthcare, a leading healthcare publication, as one of its Innovators for 2024 for his pioneering work in the field of focused ultrasound.

Modern Healthcare's Innovators Awards and recognition program recognizes leaders and organizations driving innovation that improves patient care, achieves measurable results, and contributes to the clinical and financial goals of the organization.

The profiles of the honorees are featured in the April 8 issue of MH magazine and online at [ModernHealthcare.com/Innovator-Awards](https://www.modernhealthcare.com/Innovator-Awards).

"The role of innovation has always been paramount in healthcare, and our 2024 honorees as top Innovators are driving real change in the industry," said Mary Ellen Podmolik, editor in chief of Modern Healthcare. "The wide variety of projects underway by these executives and organizations demonstrates a dedication to tackling the 'what ifs' that can improve the delivery of healthcare and improve communities and the patient experience."

Elias is being honored for his groundbreaking work with focused ultrasound technology that can replace a surgeon's scalpels with focused sound waves. Instead of requiring a neurosurgeon to cut into a patient's skull, the technology can focus sound waves deep inside a patient's brain to disrupt faulty brain circuits. Elias' pioneering research helped pave the way for the federal Food and Drug Administration to approve the minimally invasive technology as a new treatment option both for essential tremor, a common movement disorder, and for Parkinson's disease symptoms.



"I am extremely honored to be recognized by Modern Healthcare, but the innovations with focused ultrasound that occurred at UVA were the results of a highly efficient and competent team working together for several years to produce a new medical procedure for our patients."

His success with the game-changing approach has attracted national and international attention, drawn patients to UVA Health from around the world, and spurred research into the potential of the technology for many other healthcare applications, such as at UVA Health's own Focused Ultrasound Cancer Immunotherapy Center. Further, the effects of Elias' work can be seen in a growing number of hospitals around the globe, where focused ultrasound treatments are improving lives and offering appropriate patients a new, less-invasive treatment alternative to traditional brain surgery.

"I am extremely honored to be recognized by Modern Healthcare, but the innovations with focused ultrasound that occurred at UVA were the results of a highly efficient and competent team working together for several years to produce a new medical procedure for our patients," said Elias, Professor of Neurosurgery and Neurology, UVA School of Medicine. "It is actually an incredible technology that reaches deep into the brain, without incisions or drilling, to create a life-changing intervention. This is only the beginning, as there are many investigations underway to deliver drugs for cancer or to manipulate the brain's circuitry to ease pain or stop epilepsy."

Elias was recognized as the "Edlich-Henderson Innovator of the Year" for 2018 by UVA's Licensing & Ventures Group. That award is given to a University faculty member whose research is making a major impact on society.

Developing new treatments to improve the lives of patients is a core mission of UVA Health and the UVA Paul and Diane Manning Institute of Biotechnology under construction at Fontaine Research Park in Charlottesville. The institute will fast track new treatments and cures and transform how healthcare is delivered across the state and beyond.

Elias' work with focused ultrasound — and UVA Health's focused ultrasound research in general — has long been supported by the Charlottesville-based Focused Ultrasound Foundation.



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