

M.D. NEWS

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**Arthritis
Health
Associates
PLLC**

Arthritis Health Associates PLLC

By Michael Masucci

The term known as “arthritis” usually brings to mind the disease that takes knitting and gardening away from grandmothers and grandfathers worldwide. It’s the disease where Alevé commercials advertise 65-year-old men frolicking to the sweet disco sounds of Earth, Wind & Fire. Yet, even with quick jokes and cliché sarcasm comes a certain amount of undeniable truth about arthritis: over 43 million people in the United States are living with arthritis or autoimmune conditions. The general public knows very little about the 100 different types of autoimmune/arthritis conditions, the new medications, advances in treatment or about the medical practice

“At any time, we participate in 15 to 20 active studies. Research discoveries provide successful ways to treat a patient. There has never been a better time to be a rheumatologist,” said Patrick J. Riccardi, M.D.



PHOTO BY ROBERT A. DRACKER

where autoimmune conditions and arthritis can be diagnosed and a patient’s quality of life can be greatly improved.

I was fortunate enough to be given the chance to interview some of the distinguished minds of the individuals who provide care to patients dealing with arthritis and rheumatoid conditions at Arthritis Health Associates PLLC, one of the only two medical practices in Central New York that specialize in treating patients afflicted with arthritis and associated conditions. Dr. Patrick J. Riccardi and Linda Warnowicz were kind enough to spend some time with me illustrating how new technologies and medicines developed in the last decade have served as extremely effective treatments for the many forms of arthritis. Also, patients gave their thoughts on new treatment procedures and processes that make Arthritis Health Associates not just your standard medical practice, but a place where patients feel *comfortable* and *cared for*.

Arthritis Health Associates, formed in 1998, was founded by Dr. Lorne Runge, who has since retired from medicine, and Dr. Riccardi. Arthritis Health Associates has grown considerably since that time and now has nine additional providers: Drs. Linda J. Warnowicz, Mary Abdulky, George Mtanos, Jim Hyla and Ramzi Khairallah,; Lynne McIlvain, P.A.; Laurie Dawley, N.P.; Carol Stoianoff, N.P.; and Jeffrey Slavich, P.A. In addition, Arthritis Health Associates has 30 office support staff and generates more than 40,000 patient visits annually. It is a private practice located near the Syracuse University area that specializes in providing health care for patients with arthritis and autoimmune disease. These illnesses can cause inflammation (redness, swelling and pain) and degeneration of joints and surrounding structure. In addition to providing services at its office, physicians provide in-patient hospital consultations when requested by area physicians.

Often, people assume that arthritis is a disease of the aged; however, approximately half of Arthritis Health Associates’ patients are under the age of 60. Arthritis Health Associates provides treatment for patients with many types of conditions including osteoarthritis, lupus, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis (a very painful and debilitating arthritis of the spine), juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis — a diagnosis for roughly 1.3 million Americans every year.

The depth of each physician’s experience in treating arthritis and rheumatic conditions is one of the key factors in the practice’s success. Dr. Riccardi has been providing care to patients since 1981. He earned his medical degree in Syracuse at SUNY Upstate and completed his residency at the University of Wisconsin. Thereafter, he completed a fellowship at the University of California at San



Seated, left to right: Patrick J. Riccardi, M.D.; Ramzi Khairallah, M.D.; Carol Stoianoff, FNP; James Hyla, M.D. Standing, left to right: Linda J. Warnowicz, M.D.; Jeffrey Slavich, P.A.; Lynne McIlvain, P.A.; Mary Abdulky, M.D.; George Mtanos, M.D.; and Laurie Dawley, N.P.

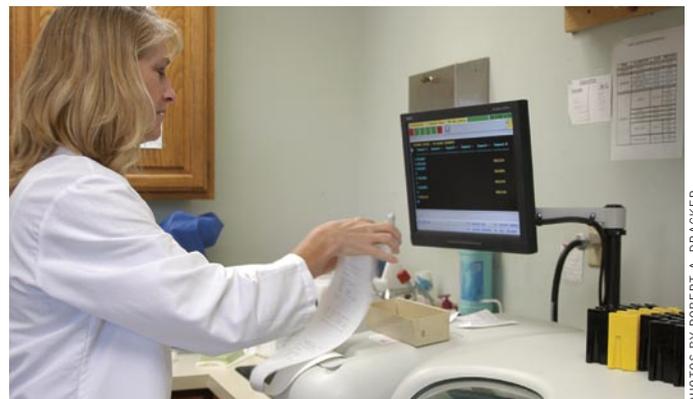
Francisco. Similarly, Dr. Warnowicz has been providing care to patients since 1990. She earned her medical degree at UMDNJ – New Jersey Medical School and went on to receive her internal medicine training at the Medical College of Pennsylvania, now Drexel Medical College. She returned to UMDNJ to complete her fellowship in rheumatology. All physicians in the practice are Board Certified in Rheumatology and have over 100 years of combined experience.

With every well-run company is a set of administrators and staff who truly connect with and understand the clients. The staff at Arthritis Health Associates is fully committed to being a practice that is both professional and personable with their patients. Director of Clinical Services Tina Olszewski has worked with Dr. Riccardi for more than 25 years. She says, “We know the patients and we know the disease. Our staff of nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, secretaries and other administration has worked around the disease for as long as 25 years, with the average staff tenure of seven years. This experience provides us with an in-depth understanding of the disease and our patient population. We are a forward-thinking practice that stays focused on our passion for helping people with autoimmune diseases and arthritis live a more enjoyable life.”

A provider team with years of clinical experience coupled with an intense commitment to research and clinical trials provides patients with the most advanced treatments available. The past decade has seen dramatic advances in the availability of effective medications. Specifically, there have been

a number of marked advances in treatment for patients with rheumatoid and psoriatic arthritis. Intravenous infusion of biologic medicines is one of the newer treatments available to patients with these diagnoses. To this day, the infusion of biologics and disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (known as DMARDs) has helped dramatically improve the quality of patients’ lives. Robert Rose, a patient at Arthritis Health Associates for more than a decade, was at one point bound to his bedside at home due to the extreme pain and complications of his rheumatoid arthritis. Ever since Mr. Rose starting receiving infusion care at Arthritis Health Associates, his symptoms have dramatically decreased, and he has been able to enjoy a regular life style. “The newer more effective medicine increases your appreciation of life. I have a handicap sticker sitting in my car right now, but I don’t use it, I only use it when I have to.

Arthritis Health Associates’ on-site laboratory provides quicker turnaround time for testing and, therefore, a quicker diagnosis and better treatment plans.



The product speaks for itself ... I am extremely happy with the care and medicine that I have received.”

As a reflection of its commitment to providing the highest level of care to its patients, Arthritis Health Associates renovated its office to accommodate infusion services. It now offers patients undergoing infusion therapy the convenience of having their treatments in the office in its infusion suite. Infusion care may take as little as 30 minutes or as long as two hours, and, although on-site infusion care is convenient, the greater benefit to patients is the accessibility to their own physician and infusion-trained nurses during treatment.

Effective disease management resulting in an increased quality of life for patients diagnosed with arthritis or an autoimmune condition is based upon not only the doctors’ depth of knowledge — which, by all means, is very crucial to every practice — but by Arthritis Health Associates’ commitment to research and clinical trials. Dr. Riccardi elaborated on the amount of research studies that the practice conducts. He says, “At any time we participate in 15 to 20 active studies. Research discoveries provide successful ways to treat a patient. There has never been a better time to be a rheumatologist.” Medicine is so advanced in this day and era; it provides doctors the ability to improve patient outcomes. He continues, “I feel confident when someone with inflammatory arthritis comes into our practice, we will have a way to significantly alter the patient’s disease outcome.”

Dr. Warnowicz also agrees that new medicine is exponentially getting better. “Treatments are better than even three years ago, and I expect in the next five years that research will continue to provide us with a greater ability to improve the quality of life for

Infusion care may take as little as 30 minutes or as long as two hours, and although on-site infusion care is convenient, the greater benefit to patients is the accessibility to their own physician and infusion-trained nurses during treatment. Here, Dr. Mary Abdulkay oversees infusion treatment for a patient.

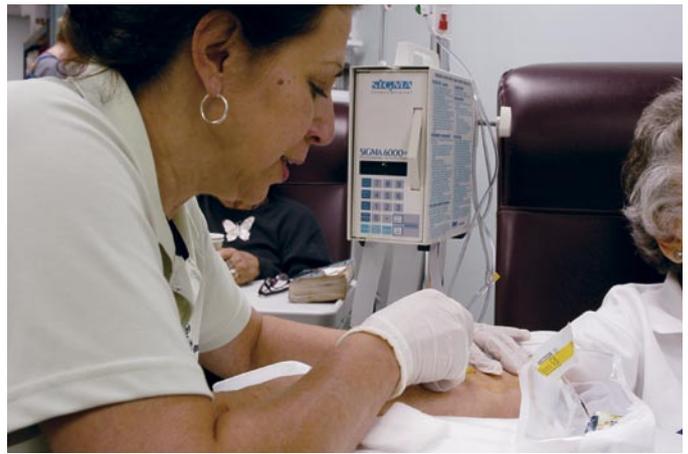
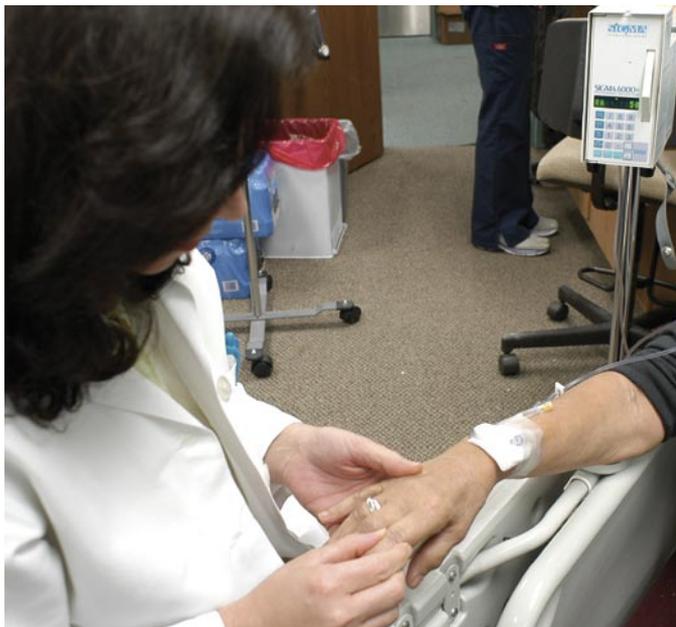


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Below and opposing page: The infusion of medicine, such as biologic medicine and disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (known as DMARDs), has helped reduce the ailments and pain afflicted by forms of arthritis such as psoriatic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis to many patients.

patients.” Essentially, the level of care is now higher than it’s ever been in the last decade. Terry Champney, an ankylosing spondylitis patient at Arthritis Health Associates, was at first skeptical of receiving infusion medicine when it was first offered to him for his condition. Although, after receiving the infusions and following necessary visits to the doctor, Mr. Champney became a firm believer of infusion medicine and the quality of care offered at Arthritis Health Associates. “The care is very good, like a family. They are accommodating . . . they ask you a few questions and you’re in and out quickly. It’s done a world of good. It’s really something patients shouldn’t be afraid of. I have had 100 great infusions, and now I am doing manual labor again.”

Arthritis Health Associates has the ability to always take on new patients: “We have quick access for patients. It’s just a lot easier here. We believe in responding quickly to patient demand, allowing us to help more patients in a timely manner.” Having patients who are content with their medical treatments and the level of service is what makes Arthritis Health Associates stand out amongst its peers.

Arthritis Health Associates’ reputation among referring physicians and its ability to improve the lifestyle of patients has provided it with solid footing to meet future needs. Practice Administrator Joyce Dennington says, “Our commitment to high-quality treatment coupled with our continued focus on personalized care is at the foundation of our practice. Because patients with arthritis and autoimmune conditions may have been diagnosed as early as childhood or early adulthood, we often have been providing their care for years . . . and we’ll be here for them and future patients when they need us.” ■

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