

Building Hope:

Advancing Cancer Care for Our Community



NANCY HOWELL AGEE
CEO EMERITUS

MESSAGE FROM NANCY HOWELL AGEE: TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH RESEARCH

Dear Friends,

Research supports the heart of our mission at Carilion Clinic, upholding the cornerstone of our commitment to patient care and community health excellence. Every day, our dedicated research teams are pioneering the future of healthcare while ensuring our neighbors receive world-class care close to home.

Our commitment to this effort is strong, with more than 140 clinical trials currently underway. These initiatives span 18 clinical areas, from cancer and cardiovascular studies to pediatrics and surgical techniques. When clinical trials thrive close to home, our community thrives too. Patients gain invaluable access to pioneering treatments in a place where they can be supported by loved ones and maintain a sense of normalcy. Researchers like Shannon Armbruster, MD, whose story is featured below, are transforming treatment and patient outcomes thanks to clinical trials.

We are expanding the boundaries of what is possible in cancer care. The Carilion Taubman Cancer Center will feature a dedicated, state-of-the-art unit staffed by specialized teams offering personalized care for early-stage oncology clinical trials. In addition to this unit, the Cancer Center's integrated care facility will offer comprehensive cancer treatment for IV clinical trials, including radiation oncology, medical oncology and radiopharmaceutical trials for patients in our community. By nurturing vital collaboration between researchers and clinicians, this new facility will spark innovation and accelerate the development of treatments that change lives.

We are investing in the vision that was set 125 years ago to improve the health of every community we serve. By keeping clinical trials close to home, we ensure our patients have access to the best possible care while continuing to advance medical science.

One day a cure for cancer will be discovered. And it just might be discovered close to home.

With heartfelt gratitude,

CEO Emeritus
Carilion Clinic

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WOMEN LEADING THE WAY IN HEALTHCARE



Left to right: Lindsay Collins, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FACHE, Vice President of Medicine, Acute Care Services; Tracey Criss, MD, Adult Psychiatry; Elizabeth Polk, MD, Family Medicine

Women have played a critical role advancing healthcare in our region. This month, Carilion Clinic highlighted this legacy at a luncheon celebrating many of Southwest Virginia's most impactful female leaders.

While women are often changemakers driving progress for others, the luncheon underscored the importance of bringing women's health itself to the forefront. The gathering featured a panel of Carilion leaders who discussed critical health disparities facing women and shared insights on preventive care and trends influencing women's health outcomes. Speakers and guests

empowered one another to champion health through connectivity, acknowledging the vitality of support and inspiration among women.

As the vision for Carilion Taubman Cancer Center continues to develop, we remain committed to addressing the unique challenges in women's cancer care through innovative research, compassionate treatment and community outreach. This dedication to excellence ensures that women in our region have access to the highest quality cancer care close to home—today and for generations to come.

TRANSFORMING SURVIVOR CARE

Transformative cancer research includes studying ways to revolutionize life after cancer. Shannon Armbruster, MD, leads groundbreaking research on endometrial cancer survivorship, working to ensure that survivors receive the comprehensive care needed to thrive in remission. Her research team includes Virginia Tech and University of Virginia specialists who provide comprehensive expertise to guide participants through the program.

"We can cure most of these women of their cancer, but they're left with physical and mental challenges, poor quality of life and poor sexual function," says Dr. Armbruster, previously of MD Anderson Cancer Center, who joined Carilion, where she continues to advance her research. Her work focuses on lifestyle interventions that engage survivors and their support networks in healthy eating and movement to help them recover and regain their health.

Endometrial cancer survivors receive wearable fitness trackers and act as team captains for up to five participants. Weekly virtual sessions combine 15 minutes of movement with 15 minutes of survivor discussion during which participants



Dr. Shannon Armbruster,
MD, MPH

GYNECOLOGY, ONCOLOGY
CARILION CLINIC

problem-solve together and build community. This approach creates sustainable change for survivors that continues long after the intervention ends.

Dr. Armbruster envisions expanding this program through the new Carilion Taubman Cancer Center so that patients who typically can't access clinical trials due to distance can participate.

"My goal is to have a national trial open to give access to this type of research across the country," she explains. The program also involves a community advisory board of survivors who help direct the research focus and grant applications.

The Carilion Taubman Cancer Center will strengthen collaborative research efforts such as those managed by Dr. Armbruster, while bringing comprehensive cancer services together in one patient-centered facility. By strengthening partnerships among participating institutions, these innovative approaches to survivorship care will continue transforming cancer care in our community and beyond, ensuring patients receive world-class treatment close to home.



ASHLEY WAINWRIGHT DONAHUE'S JOURNEY AT CARILION CLINIC

What began as a routine mammogram turned into an unexpected breast cancer diagnosis for Ashley Wainwright Donahue. In a moment, her health became all that mattered.

"We thought that [treatment] was just going to be a simple lumpectomy, followed up by some radiation. And my genetic testing came back clean, so I had none of the genetic markers [for breast cancer]," Wainwright Donahue said.

Then came another pivotal moment—the discovery of a high-grade tumor that hadn't appeared on imaging. This unexpected finding meant chemotherapy would now be necessary, changing everything about her treatment plan.

As a mother of five, business owner and wife of 30 years, Wainwright Donahue's life demands careful balance. The Carilion team recognized this reality, creating a comprehensive treatment plan that considered both her medical needs and her busy schedule.

"I have said many times that there are so many other areas in my life in which I'd like to be a VIP. However, that is exactly how Carilion and the Cancer Center made me feel."

[HEAR MORE OF ASHLEY'S STORY](#)

COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, a time to recognize the importance of early detection and preventive screenings. Cancer of the colon ranks as the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, and recent trends indicate a notable rise in colorectal cancer diagnoses at younger individuals. When identified at an early stage, there is a survival rate of 90 percent.

Current guidelines recommend beginning screenings at age 45, regardless of whether symptoms are present, with regular follow-up examinations every 10 years. These screenings play a vital role in identifying precancerous polyps within the large intestine.

Carilion Clinic has a Commission on Cancer-accredited program dedicated to improving cancer patients' survival rates and quality of life. Carilion's commitment to early screening and detection reflects its mission to provide comprehensive, high-quality care to the communities we serve. As a CoC-accredited program, Carilion offers innovative treatments, including minimally invasive procedures for abdominal operations, while managing treatment regimens outlined by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) and the American Cancer Society Commission on Cancer (ACS CoC). The development of the Carilion Taubman Cancer Center will further enable patients to receive innovative care close to home by integrating advanced techniques with our talented surgeons.

MEET THE TEAM

We are truly grateful to those helping us shine a light on the incredible work being done at Carilion. This month, we're highlighting three providers who champion colorectal care. Thank you for all that you do.

– Steve Arner, President and CEO, Carilion Clinic



Vivek Kesar, MD

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Terry P. Nickerson, MD

COLORECTAL SURGERY
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Stephanie Greathouse, NP

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