

2026 'HEAD FOR THE HILLS'

AGENDA

Friday, October 23

7:30 AM - BREAKFAST

8:00-9:00 AM

Fatty Liver Disease in Modern Practice: From New Terminology to Primary Care Management

Dr. Rasmiyah Jastan - Family Medicine Program Director, Ballad Health Johnston Memorial

This lecture will provide a comprehensive overview of fatty liver disease, with a focus on its evolving definitions, clinical relevance, and management in the primary care setting.

9:00-10:00 AM

Vaccine Hesitancy

Quincy Byrdsong, EdD, MA, CCRP - Vice President Research Operations, Ballad Health

Immunization has been regarded as one of the most important discoveries in modern medicine. According to the CDC, childhood immunizations prevent four million deaths worldwide annually. Despite the documented benefits, vaccine hesitancy continues, and was markedly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent public health concerns, legal discourse, and political discussions have made the use of vaccines more visible now than ever before. As a result, the complicated history of immunizations in both the United States and abroad must be reimagined with a contemporary lens to ensure optimal understanding of vaccines in public health. This talk will look at the history of vaccine hesitancy, current challenges for vaccine participation, and strategies to counter the negative impacts of vaccine hesitancy.

10:00-11:00 AM

Tick-Borne Diseases

Richard T Marconi, PhD - Professor, Microbiology & Immunology, VCU School of Medicine

Tick-borne diseases including Lyme, Babesiosis, Anaplasmosis and Ehrlichiosis are a growing public health threat. While vaccination is widely used in veterinary medicine to prevent Lyme disease, at the present time there is no vaccine available for prevention of any tick-borne disease in humans. Companion animals and wildlife are important sentinels for understanding the risk of tick-borne diseases. In this presentation, the basic biology of the pathogens associated with these diseases and the ticks that transmit them will be discussed. In addition, the latest efforts to develop vaccines and improved diagnostics will be reviewed.

Friday, October 23 (Continued)

11:00 AM-12:00 PM

Using Pelvic Floor Therapy to Improve Outcomes in Bowel, Bladder, and Pain Conditions

Amanda Haasken, PT, PRPC – LewisGale Hospital Montgomery Outpatient Therapy

Will identify what conditions Pelvic PT can benefit, describe to patients what treatments they can expect, and provide initial interventions to patients as they initiate the process.

12:00 PM – LUNCH

1:00-2:00 PM

Hidden in Plain Sight: Secondary Substance Exposure in Pediatric Practice

Mary Jo Hedrick, PhD - Associate Director of Research, ETSU Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Learning and Development

Children living with parental substance use often present with behavioral, developmental, and mental health symptoms long before the root cause is identified. This session reviews trends in Southwest Virginia, long-term outcomes, and clinical red flags providers can use to identify secondary exposure. Attendees will leave with practical screening considerations and tools to better support children and families in real-world practice.

2:00-3:00 PM

From Concern to Connection: Recognizing Autism and Navigating Referrals in Primary Care

Christopher Qualls, PhD - Senior Psychologist, SWVA Child Development Clinic

Timely identification of autism spectrum disorder can dramatically impact a child's developmental trajectory. In this interactive workshop, primary care providers will learn how to recognize early behavioral and developmental signs of ASD, address caregiver concerns, and connect families with appropriate diagnostic and early intervention services. Practical referral strategies and resources will be highlighted to support efficient care coordination.

3:00-4:00 PM

Two Lives, One Opportunity: Supporting Families Affected by Perinatal Substance Use

Michele Diehl, LPC - LMHP Lead, VMAP for Moms+/ Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Health, Carilion Clinic

Jen Wells, MD - Reproductive Psychiatrist, Director of Women's Mental Health, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

Perinatal substance use disorder (PSUD) is an increasingly common challenge in rural healthcare settings, where limited resources, stigma, and fragmented systems can complicate care for pregnant and postpartum patients. This session will explore practical, evidence-based strategies for identifying and supporting individuals experiencing substance use during the perinatal period.

Saturday, October 24

7:30 AM - BREAKFAST

8:00-9:00 AM

Patient Voices: Mental Health Challenges

Marybeth Mitcham, PhD, MPH - Assistant Professor, Global & Community Health, George Mason University

Using a narrative case study approach, this session will share the stories of people experiencing mental health episodes, from the perspective of those directly and indirectly impacted.

9:00-10:00 AM

Loneliness, Social Isolation, and Health

Christopher Welker, PhD - Postdoctoral Researcher, Emotion & Behavior Lab at University of Virginia

The United States is experiencing a sharp rise in social isolation and loneliness. This talk will compare social isolation and loneliness, explain their impacts on mental and physical health, and assess the effectiveness of current interventions designed to counteract their growth.

10:00-11:00 AM

Recognizing Black Women's Voices Beyond the Threshold

Wendy Lewis, PhD, LPC, AADC, ALPS - Clinical Director, PAAC Infinite Pathways

Roshay Richardson, LCCE - Doula/Breastfeeding Coordinator, Virginia Rural Health Association

Providers describe lived experiences while introducing factors that mitigate medical mistrust regarding pain in women of color specifically Black maternal pain. The goal is to learn ways to: provide culturally responsible communication about pain, create welcoming environments and address access barriers.

11:00 AM-12:00 PM

CDC Guidelines for Pain Management

Arthur Ollendorff, MD - Chief Academic Officer, Carilion Clinic/Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

This talk will provide an overview of CDC guidelines for pain management, with a focus on safe, effective prescribing practices. It will also review key aspects of Virginia law governing pain medication prescriptions, including regulatory requirements and clinical considerations to support compliance and optimal patient care.

Bagged Lunches Available After the Conference