

BATTLING AN EPIDEMIC:

New facilities enhance **DIABETES** *care and research.*

Expanding clinical and research endeavors

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"There are very few centers across the country where all these services are available in one location like this."

Jerry L. Nadler, MD, Director of the Strelitz Diabetes Center



The renovated Strelitz Diabetes Center includes additional rooms for patient care and for patient access to the latest experimental treatments.

Daniel "Danny" Hazelwood, 62, knew he had to do something. Diagnosed at age 40 with Type 2 diabetes, the Virginia Beach resident was taking four medications by 2011. Yet his blood sugar level was consistently too high and his weight had jumped to nearly 300 pounds.

"I felt like I needed more advanced care than I was getting," Mr. Hazelwood says. So a friend suggested he call the EVMS Strelitz Diabetes Center.

Over the last two decades, the Strelitz Diabetes Center (SDC) has assembled a world-class team of physicians, caregivers and scientists who are dedicated to providing innovative and compassionate care for patients while helping to develop exciting new treatments for the disease. Now, the staff has a facility to match its bold ambitions.

Last fall, after a year in temporary space, the staff returned to find E.V. Williams Hall transformed inside and out following nearly \$5 million in renovations. Behind the contemporary metal and glass exterior is a state-of-the-art facility built with patient convenience and comfort in mind.

"We used to struggle to find enough space to see patients for routine care and to see patients for our research trials," says Joseph A. Alois, MD, Clinical Director of the SDC. "Now, this redesigned space allows us to be much more efficient."

Patients can see one of eight endocrinologists (physicians specially trained to care for people with diabetes and related disorders), certified diabetes nurse educators, a dietitian and a comprehensive team of caregivers who share a passion for helping others.

Mr. Hazelwood praises his endocrinologist, Yumi Imai, MD, for the time she spent with him and her thorough explanations. "My first visit with her lasted over an hour," he recalls. "That really impressed me. She explained all my lab work and made sure I understood what it meant."

The full scope of diabetes care

Diabetes is a worldwide epidemic. Virginia lies in what's called the "diabetes belt," a region of the U.S. where the prevalence of the disease is higher than the rest of the country. And the prevalence of diabetes in southeastern Virginia is more than twice as high as the statewide rate.

"As a top diabetes center in the nation, we're definitely in the right place," says Jerry L. Nadler, MD, Director of the Strelitz Diabetes Center, Chair of Internal Medicine and the Harry H. Mansbach Chair in Internal Medicine.

Patients can attend individual or group education sessions to learn more about how to control their disease. They can undergo a litany of tests all in one convenient location — bone density for osteoporosis, tests for nerve damage, and an ultrasound for thyroid cancer.



"There are very few centers across the country where all these services are available in one location like this," Dr. Nadler says.

But the center isn't just for people with diabetes.

The SDC also houses the Neuroendocrine Unit, a worldwide referral center for patients with neuroendocrine tumors, directed by Aaron I. Vinik, MD, PhD, a professor in the Department of Internal Medicine. More than 50,000 people live with neuroendocrine tumors in the United States, with 2,500 new cases diagnosed each year.

The new facility has provided space for a kidney disease program. Because diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, the new program was designed to allow kidney and diabetes specialists to interact and collaborate to address patient needs.

The renovation has expanded the number of patient exam rooms available for care or clinical research from 12 to 20. The center accommodates about 14,000 patient visits a year, Dr. Alois says.

Since the center's founding, research has been a key mission. Teams of

clinicians and scientists are working to better understand how obesity leads to diabetes and heart disease, how a virus may trigger Type 1 diabetes, and how they might even stop or reverse the disease.

A major area of study is a common complication of diabetes: nerve disease. Also known as neuropathy, it can range from pain and numbness in the extremities to problems with the digestive system, urinary tract, blood vessels and heart. Symptoms can be mild, disabling or even fatal.

A diagnosis leads to diabetes center

The Strelitz Diabetes Center is named for Leonard Strelitz, a businessman and philanthropist who helped raise the initial \$8 million — including his own \$1 million contribution — to make the center possible.

The new facility was designed to keep the center at the forefront of patient care and research. An infusion room was added because many new clinical trials deliver treatment by pump rather than injection.

"This will open us up to participate in the most advanced and promising

trials for diabetes," says Dr. Nadler. "We're not limited."

Keeping above the rising tide of diabetes

About 8 percent of Virginia's population has diabetes, and that rises to 20 percent in southeastern Virginia. Another 40 percent is projected to develop prediabetes, Dr. Nadler says.

The EVMS focus on diabetes aligns with the school's mission to be the most community-oriented medical school in the nation. The center's care extends far beyond the walls of the new facility. Staff members treat patients at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital and Bon Secours DePaul Medical Center, both in Norfolk, and Sentara Princess Anne Hospital in Virginia Beach, as well as outpatients at Sentara CarePlex Hospital in Hampton.

With proper care, as SDC patient Danny Hazelwood has learned, diabetes is a manageable disease. He's down from four medications to one, his blood sugar levels are back in the normal range, and he walks for exercise nearly every day. Best of all, thanks to the guidance he received from his SCD caregivers, he has lost more than 90 pounds.

Unfortunately, many people have diabetes and don't know it. With support from the Anthem Foundation and the Obici Foundation, staff at the SDC are conducting screenings throughout southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore to help as many people as possible.

"You do someone a tremendous service if you diagnose diabetes before the terrible complications set in," Dr. Alois says. "Early diagnosis prevents the severe consequences that may arise."