

# Tarheel Tandem



Volume 78 | Spring 2024

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## President's Message

By Meeti Nigam, NCMSA President; [nigammeeti@gmail.com](mailto:nigammeeti@gmail.com)



Dear Friends:

I want to take this opportunity to thank the board and the many compassionate community members, leaders, partners, and supporters for what they have meant to our community and to me. You all encapsulate the purpose of our mission through your efforts and serve as an inspiration to myself and our organization as a whole.

With gratitude, my two-year term as president of the North Carolina Medical Society Alliance comes to a close at the end of the annual meeting in May. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in this capacity as president from 2022-2024. It has been a fruitful two years and I have enjoyed every aspect of it, from our board meetings to traveling to Raleigh and Greensboro to celebrating 100 years of hard work and this amazing Alliance. I am personally very proud of our ongoing achievements and I identify deeply with the value we place on relationships and the belief that we can, and always will, do more together than we do alone. Our mission strengthens us.

The NCMSA has always been an organization you can count on and that will not change. Thanks to dedicated volunteers, leadership, physician community partners, and countless others, we will continue to advance our work to bring people and resources together to meet community health needs. I am extremely confident the NCMSA will continue to give, advocate and volunteer for the well-being of the physician community and families. I know I am in good company and our potential is limitless.

The following wisdom from Maya Angelou has guided me in life, and I trust it will do the same for you: "Do the best you can. But when you know better, do better." I hope I did. I hope I have.

Thank you again for your many compassionate actions, support, partnership, and friendship. I am so thankful, humbled, and inspired – and I will always treasure these moments and times together.

Sincerely,

Meeti Nigam

# Important Discussion on Physician Suicide – May 15 in Greensboro – Please Attend

By Kirby Sheridan, NCMSA Vice President for Program Development; kirbypsheridan@gmail.com

**May 15 at the Greensboro History Museum**  
**6:15 pm – Heavy hors d’oeuvres; 7:00 pm – Program**  
**Free Admission**

After a downturn in the number of deaths by suicide in the US in 2020, the rate of suicide began to climb to 14.5 deaths per 100,000 people in 2022.<sup>1</sup> In that same year, between 300 and 400 doctors died by suicide.<sup>2</sup> That is a 40% higher rate among male physicians and a 130% higher rate among female physicians compared to the general population.<sup>2</sup>

It is hard to talk about suicide. And if you are the healer, charged with the responsibility of looking after others, it can be very hard to admit that you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, depression or substance misuse. As a community, we need to make channels available so that those discussions are easier to initiate. In supporting our physicians and physician families, as well as others in healthcare, we need to bring this problem out into the open to find solutions.



Betsy Gall, our guest speaker on May 15, is speaking all over the country about physician suicide after her oncologist husband,

Dr. Matthew Gall, tragically and unexpectedly



took his own life on Thanksgiving Day in 2019. Betsy recently wrote a book titled *The Illusion of the Perfect Profession*. It is a story about love, physician suicide, and finding comfort and purpose in the aftermath. Betsy will share her story with us and answer questions.



Dr. Joseph Jordan, CEO of the North Carolina Professionals Health Program (NCPHP), will follow Betsy to discuss the support the NCPHP offers health professionals, allowing them to seek help, recover, and return to their careers.



The NCMSA hopes you will attend this vital discussion at the Greensboro History Museum on May 15. Heavy hors d’oeuvres will be served in the lobby at 6:15 pm. The program will begin at 7:00 pm in the auditorium. Questions and answers will follow along with dessert. RSVP is requested by May 7 to [admin@ncmsalliance.org](mailto:admin@ncmsalliance.org) or 919-810-4081. Admission is free.

1. CDC
2. 2022 Medscape National Physician Burnout & Suicide Report

## 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Available Nationwide

By Laura Pinto MHSA, MS, RN, AMAA Programs Council member

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is now the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. In July 2022, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration launched the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which replaced the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The change is in response to the increasing number of people reporting mental distress, and the need for improved access to and mobilization of mental health services.

The increase in calls to the crisis line has been significant: from about 50,000 in 2005 (when the initial support line was established), to over 2.5 million in 2021. Data from August 2022 show that the new 988 number saw a 45 percent increase in contact

volume compared with August 2021 (Smith, T. October 19, 2022. 988 – the new suicide prevention hotline – sees big increase in use. Available at: [ama-assn.org](http://ama-assn.org).)

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a national network of more than 180 local crisis centers in all 50 states. According to [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org), “People experiencing suicidal ideation, substance use, and/or mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress can call, chat, or text 988 and speak to trained crisis counselors.” This lifeline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and provides free and confidential support and resources.

# Exciting News! NCMS Alliance Has Joined Instagram!

We're thrilled to announce that the NCMS Alliance is now on Instagram! Follow us @NCMSAlliance to stay updated on all the latest happenings, events, and initiatives within our Alliance community. Capture and share your favorite moments from our activities, upload clips and videos, and connect with fellow members – all on our new Instagram platform!

## Why Instagram? Here's why it's the perfect fit for us:

- 1. Visual Appeal:** Share captivating photos and videos effortlessly.
- 2. Community Connection:** Engage with brands, influencers, and our members on a popular social platform.
- 3. Versatile Features:** From short-form videos to live streaming, Instagram offers a plethora of tools to enhance our outreach.

With nearly 70% of Instagram users actively sharing photos and videos, it's clear that this platform is where the action is! Join us as we leverage Instagram's user-friendly interface to amplify our message and connect with a wider audience. Plus, we can easily stay in the loop with our Alliance groups, partners, and interest communities, ensuring that our engagement remains relevant and impactful.

Let's embrace the power of Instagram together! Follow NCMS Alliance today and become a part of the progress we're striving for. Your support means everything. Thank you!



@NCMSALLIANCE



The AMA Alliance Annual meeting will take place in two sessions again this year – virtual sessions, May 21 and 22, where voting for next year's officers and bylaws changes will take place, and in-person sessions in Nashville, May 31-June 2, where officer installations and several inspiring speakers will educate us and fun gatherings will happen. Early bird registration ends April 22.

Please go to [amaalliance.org](https://amaalliance.org) to register or for more information.

# National Doctors' Day 2024 – Honor the Unrelenting Work of Physicians

By Susan Edens Hammer, NCMSA Secretary; [sjehammer@att.net](mailto:sjehammer@att.net)

Doctors' Day was March 30. We invite you to recognize physicians and physicians in training by donating in their honor or memory to our NCMSA Health Education Opportunity Fund. A donation for Doctors' Day will help the NCMS Alliance support the family of medicine and build effective partnerships to promote programs to effect positive change across our state.

Celebrate physicians who have helped you, took that extra time to answer your questions, or made a lasting impression on you. Provide us with the email and/or postal mail addresses of honorees and families of memorials so we can notify them of your donation. Honorees and memorials will also be recognized in the fall Tarheel Tandem.

On the first Doctors' Day, March 30, 1933, a physician's spouse in Barrow County, Georgia sent cards to all the doctors she knew and placed red carnations on the graves of those deceased. Doctors' Day continues to be an opportunity to recognize the unrelenting work of physicians and their contributions and commitment to medicine and service in their communities.

You may make your donation online at <https://ncmsalliance.org/Donate>. If you are giving in honor or memory of someone, please let us know in the comment section. Also, you may postal mail a note and check payable to the NCMS Alliance, 3739 National Drive, Suite 202, Raleigh, NC 27612.

# A Word from Racheal Kunesh, AMA Alliance President and NCMSA Past President



As I pause to write this article, I am deep into preparations for our family’s annual St. Paddy’s Day Party — a tradition since 2005, with an occasional break for high school graduations and COVID. Neither my husband nor I are of Irish descent, but we thought this would be a fun gathering to carve out. Over the years, we’ve added an optional fundraising element

to the party. When I served as president of the North Carolina Medical Society Alliance, our party goes donated funds for our childhood obesity projects. Other years our friends generously supported Lizzie’s Girl Scout Gold Award and Isaac’s Eagle Scout projects. This year I invited friends to donate to AHEI with proceeds going towards sponsorship of our AMA Alliance Annual Meeting speaker Dr. Stefanie Simmons, chief medical officer from the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes’ Foundation.

Why do we do this? It *feels good* to *do good*! Giving of our time and effort for a cause we believe in gives us a sense of fulfillment. Studies show that when we do a **good** deed, the “happy chemical” serotonin is released in our body. The Alliance affords us the opportunity to do **good** in so many ways, all while connecting with amazing people.

## Sharing Card Raises \$1325 to Aid Community Outreach

With Appreciation to the 2023 NCMS Alliance Sharing Card Donors Benefiting the NCMS Alliance Health Education Opportunity Fund

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Gay Bowman                     | Racheal Kunesh              |
| Susan Edens Hammer             | Fred and Barbara Lupton     |
| Linda-Lee Hanrahan             | Dr. Mukesh and Meeti Nigam  |
| Dr. Hubert and Emmett Haywood  | Richard and Sandra Pagano   |
| Ginger and Ken Karb            | David and Kirby Sheridan    |
| Dr. Vincent and Eileen Keipper | Mary A. Tyrey,              |
| Lucy Kernodle                  | honoring NC and Wake County |
| Dr. John and Trudy Krege       | Medical Society Alliances   |

### Thank You to the 2023 Giving Tuesday Donors:

- Dr. Benjamin and Racheal Kunesh  
Linda-Lee Hanrahan

## Medicare Needs Fixing – Now

By Merrilee Gober, BSN, RN, JD; AMA Alliance Legislation and Advocacy Council member

Since 2001, adjusted for inflation in practice costs, physician payments from Medicare have declined 30 percent. And, instead of federal laws in place to reverse this sheer drop, physicians annually face Medicare cuts unless Congress intervenes with legislation. Of course, these cuts disproportionately affect small and independent

physician practices — particularly those in more rural communities with older patient populations. But, ultimately, even practices without Medicare patients are affected, since private insurance companies commonly use Medicare fees as guides in setting their own fees for services. Adding insult to injury, all other Medicare providers get automatic yearly inflation-based payment updates.

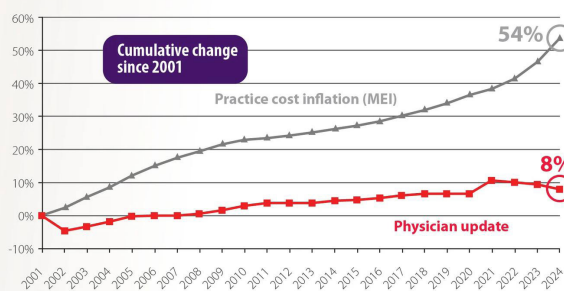
AMA President Jesse Ehrenfeld, MD, recently stated, “As physicians, we are trained to run toward emergencies. We urge Congress to do the same. We encourage Congress to act [as] if this policy decision is an emergency because — in fact — it is.”

You can help! Contact your US senators and representatives. Let them know of the difficulty that your older Medicare family members have in getting care. Request Medicare physician payment reform that has an automatic annual inflation update. Learn more — download social media materials and send Congressional emails at [www.fixmedicarenow.org](http://www.fixmedicarenow.org).

### Medicare physician payment is NOT keeping up with practice cost inflation.

Medicare updates compared to inflation in practice costs (2001–2024)

Adjusted for inflation in practice costs, Medicare physician payment declined 30% from 2001 to 2024.



Sources: Federal Register, Medicare Trustees’ Reports, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Congressional Budget Office.

Updated Jan 2024

We need to fix Medicare physician payment NOW.

This article used with permission from the AMA Alliance.

# County News

## Cabarrus County

By Kirby Sheridan, CCMSA Past President and NCMSA Board Member; kirbypsheridan@gmail.com

The Cabarrus County Medical Society and the CCMS Alliance are planning a Cinco de Mayo Fiesta, May 2 from 6-7:30pm at the Cabarrus Brewery. All physicians and PAs and their spouses and partners are invited to attend. You do not need to be a current member to join us.



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## Healthy Charlotte Alliance

Erin Edwards, Healthy Charlotte Alliance Executive Director; eedwards@healthycharlottealliance.org

### 2024 Community Health Classroom: Bone Up On All Things Orthopedic:

October 24 was a fun and informative day, as 160 community members Boned Up on All Things Orthopedic! We are most grateful to our generous sponsors and our wonderful



participants, who rotated through breakout sessions and learned about back pain, joint replacements and bone health!

**Sip & Shop With BraveWorks:** On November 2, we had an opportunity to hear just a few stories of incredible transformation and hope, behind each beautiful handmade item at BraveWorks. BraveWorks empowers women and families overcoming trauma and injustice, and bridges the gap from pain to purpose!

**Ask Anything About Women's Health ... Anonymously!** We had a blast with Dr. Alyse Kelly-Jones as she answered our most intimate questions about women's health! She tackled the three most common discussions she has with her patients including low libido in women, menopause, and the truth about hormone therapy.

### Obesity, Weight Loss Drugs, and the Food-Mood Connection:

Dr. Carmen Teague, Atrium Health, shared powerful data, affirming:

- 1) As a society, we are fat.
- 2) Obesity is a disease and it's very difficult to lose weight.
- 3) There are systemic programs, including medications, that can help!

Dr. Teague described the GLP-1 agonists on the market that are having significant results for weight loss, including side effects. In addition to being a remarkable mother and physician, Dr. Teague is also the author of the FUN and funny book, "Motherhood, Medicine, and Mayhem". While she generously gifted one to each person present, ALL proceeds go to benefit Bless Back Worldwide!

### Foster Village Charlotte Site Visit:

Alliance members were inspired by a visit to community partner and grant recipient, Foster Village Charlotte. Meeting urgent needs through welcome packs, ongoing support groups, workshops and one-on-one clinical support, FVC equips foster families with immediate



resources and connects them to a village of support! Learn more about this amazing organization at [fostervillagecharlotte.org](http://fostervillagecharlotte.org).

### The Big Picture Screening at Teen Health Connection:

Healthy Charlotte Alliance had an incredible opportunity to preview vignettes of "The Big Picture"... written by teens, performed by teens, including real-talk about the issues teens face every day ... and hear from experts, including, ahem, teens, on some of the age-old issues of adolescence and some of the new challenges facing this generation. Thank you Teen Health Connection, for all you do to support adolescents in our community. We even got to meet Pixie the therapy dog!



**Nutrition and Cancer:** On March 5, 40 members and community members enjoyed an informative program from Stephen Hursting, PhD, from the UNC Nutrition Research Institute, on Nutrition and Cancer. Dr. Hursting discussed often preventable, controllable risk factors, such as diet/obesity, smoking, infection, sun exposure, and alcohol consumption, and emphasized the data-proven links between eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and reduced cancer risk. Specializing in precision nutrition research, Dr. Hursting and his team at the Nutrition Research Institute are developing the resources that will enable health providers to replace the one-size-fit-all nutritional guidelines, with personalized recommendations for optimal health.

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# NCMS Alliance Events will be May 15-16 in Greensboro

The North Carolina Medical Society Alliance returns to the welcoming city of Greensboro for our important event on physician suicide on May 15 and our 101st annual meeting at the Starmount Forest Country Club on May 16. Thanks to the Alliance members from Greensboro for their support as we plan our meeting and Hubbard Memorial Lecture Luncheon. Please see the schedule for our two-day event below:

## Wednesday, May 15 – Greensboro History Museum – 130 Summit Avenue, Greensboro

- 6:15pm Refreshments in museum lobby
- 7:00pm Important discussion on physician suicide  
Q&A will follow with dessert

## Thursday, May 16 – Annual Meeting at the Starmount Forest Country Club – 1 Sam Snead Drive, Greensboro

- 9:00-9:30am Continental breakfast and conversation
- 9:30-11:45am Annual meeting morning session with breaks
- Noon-2:30pm Hubbard Memorial Lecture Luncheon and Installation of Officers

If you need a hotel room for May 15, we suggest the following hotels nearby:

- Marriott Greensboro Downtown at 304 N. Greene St.
- Hampton Inn & Suites Greensboro Downtown at 222 W. McGee St.
- Hyatt Place at 300 N. Eugene St.

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## Michelle G. Ries, MPH, Interim President and CEO of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine is the Keynote Speaker at Annual Meeting Morning Session

Michelle G. Ries, MPH, is Interim President & CEO of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine, and also currently serves as Associate Director.

Ries has been on the NCIOM team for over a decade, serving the Institute and the state across many roles within the organization. During her tenure with NCIOM, Ries has provided strategic leadership to the Institute in its work providing advisory



support to state stakeholders across many integral health policy issues. Ries led much of NCIOM's work over the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, including providing facilitation and drafting support for the North Carolina Scarce Resource Allocation Protocol (in partnership with the North Carolina Healthcare Association and the North Carolina Medical Society) and the Vaccine Advisory Committee (in partnership with the NC Department of Health and Human Services); Ries has directed task forces and served as primary author on task force reports including Improving Serious Illness Care in North Carolina; Dementia-Capable North Carolina, the state plan for addressing the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers; and the Task Force on Essentials for Childhood, a statewide collective plan to prevent child maltreatment and ensure child and family well-being. Ries also spearheaded NCIOM's pioneering Legislative Health Policy Fellows program, which provides state lawmakers and their staff with the data and resources needed to make effective decisions about the health of our state. Prior to her work at NCIOM, Ries worked as senior program associate in the International Health Policy and Practice Innovations program at the Commonwealth Fund. Ries received her MPH from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and a B.A. with honors in dramatic art and anthropology from the UNC-Chapel Hill, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa. She is a 2019 graduate of Leadership North Carolina.

# 101st NCMS Alliance Annual Meeting Registration

May 15-16, 2024 • Greensboro, NC • Registration Deadline: May 7, 2024

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

\*Dietary Restrictions:  Yes  No If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

## All Inclusive Member-Only Full Registration – Annual Meeting – Thursday, May 16

Thursday, May 16 • 9:00 am - 2:30 pm • Starmount Forest Country Club, 1 Sam Snead Drive, Greensboro, NC  
Morning Keynote Speaker: Michelle Ries, Interim President and CEO of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine updating us on health issues in the state and plans to address them.

**Please check box and provide numbers below. Space is limited.**

Reserve \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) for All Inclusive Member-Only Full Registration ..... \$115 per person  
(includes Continental breakfast, Hubbard Luncheon & Annual Meeting)

**Choose one entrée per person. All entrées include bread, iced tea, coffee, salad & dessert.**

- 1. Pan-Seared Chicken Breast - gruyere custard potatoes, roasted leeks, vichy carrots, mushroom duxelles, pan jus
- 2. Flounder Roulade - two rolled flounder filets stuffed with wilted spinach, ricotta and sun-dried tomato with lemon cream sauce, cauliflower gratin & orange zested carrots
- 3. Roasted Vegetable Lasagna - ricotta, pasta, fresh mozzarella, pomodoro sauce

**All Inclusive Registration Fees Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Depression & Suicide: The Stigma for Medical Professionals & What We Can Do – Wednesday, May 15

Wednesday, May 15 • 6:15 pm heavy hors d'oeuvres; 7:00 pm program  
Greensboro History Museum, 130 Summit Avenue, Greensboro, NC • Where Do the Healers Go When They Need Help?

*Featuring Betsy Gall, author of The Illusion of the Perfect Profession and Joseph Jordan, PhD., CEO of N.C. Professionals Health Program*

Check box to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) or email to admin@ncmsalliance.org or call 919-810-4081.

No charge

## Hubbard Luncheon ONLY – Thursday, May 16

Thursday, May 16 • 12:00 pm • Starmount Forest Country Club, 1 Sam Snead Drive, Greensboro, NC  
Featuring: \*\*Watch for an announcement of this year's featured North Carolina author\*\*

**Please check box and provide numbers below. Space is limited.**

Reserve \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) ONLY for the Hubbard Luncheon and Officer Installation ..... \$55 member or \$75 non-member

**Choose one entrée per person. All entrées include bread, iced tea, coffee, salad & dessert.**

- 1. Pan-Seared Chicken Breast - gruyere custard potatoes, roasted leeks, vichy carrots, mushroom duxelles, pan jus
- 2. Flounder Roulade - two rolled flounder filets stuffed with wilted spinach, ricotta and sun-dried tomato with lemon cream sauce, cauliflower gratin & orange zested carrots
- 3. Roasted Vegetable Lasagna - ricotta, pasta, fresh mozzarella, pomodoro sauce

**Hubbard Luncheon ONLY Fees Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRAND TOTAL DUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment Information

**Check** (Please make your check payable to NCMS Alliance)

**Credit Card:**  Visa  MasterCard

Credit Card # \_\_\_\_\_ CVV2# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Please mail or email your completed registration form by May 7, 2024 to:**  
Barbara Lupton, NCMSA Treasurer, 5305 Sequoia Ct., Greensboro, NC 27455  
Phone: 704-796-6175 • Email: admin@ncmsalliance.org



PO Box 30939  
Raleigh, NC 27622

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## County News

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### Wake County

#### **A Holiday Lunch at Vivo. Big deal? Yes.**

*By Virginia Scanlan, Wake County Alliance member*

Well, we made it. We survived the Covid catastrophe. More than a million citizens dead. An economy decimated. People imprisoned in their own homes. Physicians risking their lives to serve others. An historic disaster. But here we are, grateful that we are alive and that some things never change.

In the lives of physicians' spouses, one of those "somethings" is the Alliance and the comfort and camaraderie that membership brings. At an Alliance gathering, you don't have to explain yourself. Everybody knows what your life is like because we have lived it. Kindness and empathy perfume the air we breathe together, as it has been for generations.

My mother, grandmother, and probably my great-grandmother were members of the Cook County Medical Auxiliary in Chicago. In that era of medical practice, doctors worked seven days a week. They did hospital rounds every day, were on call every night, and saw patients

in their offices, even in the evenings. The doctors' vocations became their wives' vocations. And to meet the challenges of serving as their families' ever present steady hands, the wives turned to each other for guidance and support. They became lifelong best friends. They first met at auxiliary meetings.

Today, the organization of medicine has changed but the Hippocratic Oath has not. Medicine is a serious endeavor and its challenges to family life remain much the same. And the support of the Alliance's membership endures. Innovation does not reduce the need for friends. A computer cannot be your friend. (Yes, I'm looking at you Alexa!) We are here for you.

