

MARION POLICE CHIEF TO RETIRE NEXT MONTH

Following over three decades of service, Police Chief John B. Garcia officially retires in January 2021, the department announced, with his last active shift set for Friday, Dec. 11



The Standard-Times

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COVID compounded: Patients delaying routine exams

By Kerri Tallman
The Standard-Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

NEW BEDFORD — COVID has had another impact on the region's collective health: Patients haven't

been showing up for their regular check-ups and screenings.

"We're seeing people with just about any body system illness delaying coming in," said Dr. David Clark, director of family medicine at Hawthorn Medical Associates.

"Medical facilities are trying very hard to keep things as safe and disinfected as good as they can be in this setting."

Some of the health conditions these patients face are diabetes, cardiovascular issues, cancer and

mental health. Many of these issues can be easily identified at primary care visits, something that is truly hurting from the pandemic, doctors say.

See COVID, A2



St. Luke's Hospital in New Bedford. [[RYAN FEENEY/STANDARD TIMES SPECIAL/SCMG]]

COVID

From Page A1

Annual exams are the first stage of identifying any underlying medical issues. Clark said that if patients have problems, they will usually talk to their doctor at the annual exams, but many have decided not to go due to COVID. He said in general, people have medical problems and dismiss them, waiting until they get better, but sometimes this isn't the solution. Doctors are able to identify issues during these appointments, and although most are benign, the exam "allows doctors to ask the question to intervene." Regular visits also help with things that need to be continued to be evaluated, such as medication levels and other treatments.

In an email, Southcoast Health Public Information Officer Shawn Badgley said they have charted delays in patients seeking out important cardiovascular care, bariatric care, orthopedic care, and primary care.

"These are not conditions to ignore or put off," he said.

According to Cheryl Bartlett, a registered nurse and CEO of Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, there has been a 25% decrease for in-person visits. She said primary care visits identify



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Clark

changes and conditions in a patient's life, and the visit isn't just a physical exam, but also serves to indicate barriers that impact health and wellbeing.

Bartlett said this visit can include prostate-specific antigen (PSA) tests, mammograms and pap smears to identify and treat prostate, breast and cervical cancers.

Besides skipping annual check-ups, patients who currently have medical conditions that require follow-up appointments haven't been returning to medical offices and doctors are concerned.

Bartlett is concerned about patients living with diabetes and blood pressure problems. Although patients can test their blood sugar levels at home through testing strips, she said they may not be as accurate and telling as in-office A1C tests. Diabetics can also have problems with neuropathy, a type of nerve damage that can cause numbness in the feet. Bartlett said there has been a significant delay in the return of patients, down by about 20%, in meeting annual goals for A1C tests.

"It's important for them and their health — us too — and

it's important for how we get reimbursed since we are based on a value-based payment system," she said. If the practice does not monitor patients annually, there is a penalty for reimbursement.

Another issue at large is mental health, especially since the spring. According to a study from the CDC in June, 25.5% of respondents between ages 18 and 24 reported having suicidal ideas.

"Mental health stress factors are pretty high, particularly in women and children," Bartlett said. Juggling work and school, especially transitioning from remote learning to a hybrid model in August, was a stressor seen in many patients.

Counselors are available at the center for screenings, including conversations and depression screenings to gauge different levels to determine the next step. Counseling is also available via Telehealth, but in-person visits are preferred upon first discussion of mental health.

"Mental health is not at the top of the hierarchy of needs for many," she said. "Poor mental health leads to poor physical health. Less frequent visits means it is less likely to identify before it escalates to a dangerous level."

Clark, working primarily with families and children, has noted there has been a common pattern with appointment cancellations as people are afraid to visit the

office. He said children need immunizations and exams for ADD/ADHD, behavioral disorders, muscular/skeletal and joint pain.

"This could be dangerous to delay," he said. "We can find congenital abnormalities faster and treat effectively."

Clark said that children who are not immunized struggle with COVID, which creates further complications.

"Co-infecting can be catastrophic because if they're not immunized, you are headed for a bad outcome," he said. "We want to eliminate as many variables to make sure they're safe, maximize their health and maximize their chances of surviving COVID."

Cancer centers have been hit hard from COVID, with patient numbers dropping at a rapid rate. At a primary care visit, bloodwork, screenings and diagnosis can be performed to help detect cancer at an early stage. However, the issue lies in returning patients, according to Clark, where they are delaying treatment through surgery, chemotherapy and radiation.

"Some are slow growing cancers," he said. Tumors grow and get worse, increase in stage, and treatment options change as it gets progressively worse. If caught early, it could be cured or treated properly.

Southcoast Health has been seeing "below-average rates of visits across our system's service lines" which

"raises concerns about the impact of patients delaying or avoiding emergent care, preventative screenings and routine appointments, and how such delays affect the long-term health of our community," according to Badgley.

Southcoast Health is emphasizing the importance of safely accessing necessary care by ensuring patients that facilities are cleaned regularly throughout the day and following public health directives.

Hawthorn Medical Associates has also been working hard to keep a "sick-free flow," isolating patients with COVID symptoms. Clark said Hawthorn is building an entrance specifically for ill pediatric patients only where doctors can evaluate children and determine their diagnosis to separate the healthy from the sick.

"This winter, we're going to see an awful lots of illnesses," Clark said. "Parents don't want their kids in the building, but they need medical help."

Clark said that patients should not hold off on any illness, whether it be COVID symptoms or a genetic condition.

"Catching things early always gives a better outcome," he said. "If you delay, it affects your family, too. It's a snowball effect."

Follow Kerri Tallman on Twitter, @ktallman_SCT.

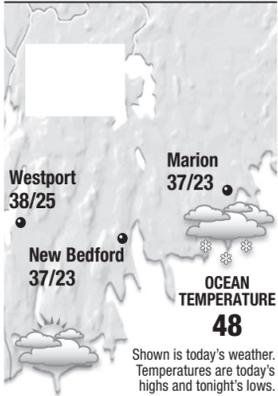
37/23

41/32

48/27

45/34

57/48



SUMMARY: Mostly cloudy today. Winds north-northwest 7-14 mph. Mainly clear tonight. Winds west-northwest 4-8 mph. A shower in spots tomorrow afternoon.

ALMANAC

New Bedford through 2 p.m. Monday
TEMPERATURE

| | |
|-----------------|------------|
| High/low | 37/28 |
| Normal high/low | 45/30 |
| Record high | 72 in 1998 |
| Record low | 6 in 2002 |

HEATING DEGREE DAYS

An index of energy consumption indicating how many degrees the average temperature was below 65 degrees for the day.

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| Monday | 32 |
| Month to date | 154 |
| Season to date | 1072 |
| Normal season to date | 1179 |

PRECIPITATION

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 24 hours ending 2 p.m. Mon. | 0.00" |
| Month to date | 2.76" |
| Normal month to date | 1.18" |
| Year to date | 24.09" |
| Normal year to date | 48.49" |
| Snowfall 24 hours ending 2 p.m. Mon. | 0.0" |
| Snowfall season to date | 0.2" |

WIND

Highest W at 12 mph

UV INDEX TODAY

| | | | |
|---------|------|--------|--------|
| 10 a.m. | Noon | 2 p.m. | 4 p.m. |
| 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

The higher the **AccuWeather.com UV Index™** number the greater the need for eye and skin protection. 0-2: Low, 3-5: Moderate, 6-7: High, 8-10: Very High, 11+: Extreme

WEATHER HISTORY

On Dec. 8, 1963, a jetliner exploded near Elkton, Md., killing all 81 on board. Lightning is believed to have caused the explosion of residual fuel under one of the outboard wing tanks as the plane passed through a vicious thunderstorm.

SUN AND MOON

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Sunrise | 6:58 a.m. | Moonrise | none |
| Sunset | 4:13 p.m. | Moonsset | 12:49 p.m. |

| | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| New | First | Full | Last |
| | | | |
| Dec 14 | Dec 21 | Dec 29 | Jan 6 |

MARINE FORECAST

Wind northwest 7-14 knots today. Seas 2-4 feet. A shower. Wind west 6-12 knots tonight. Seas 1-3 feet. Patchy clouds. Wind southwest 6-12 knots tomorrow. Seas 1-3 feet.

TIDES TODAY

| Location | High | Low |
|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| New Bedford | 1:27 a.m. 1:45 p.m. | 6:54 a.m. 7:40 p.m. |
| Canal at Buzzards Bay | 2:27 a.m. 2:46 p.m. | 10:09 a.m. 10:36 p.m. |
| Westport | 1:29 a.m. 1:47 p.m. | 7:20 a.m. 8:06 p.m. |

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather, Inc.** ©2020
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LOTTERY

MASS. DAILY NUMBERS

Drawn Sunday afternoon 2-7-8-9
 Payoffs on \$1 bet exact order
 4 digits \$5,114
 3 digits \$716
 2 digits \$61
 1 digit \$6
 Payoffs on \$1 bet any order
 4 digits \$213
 First 3 digits \$119
 Last 3 digits \$119
 Drawn Sunday night 3-4-4-4
 Payoffs on \$1 bet exact order
 4 digits \$4,967
 3 digits \$695
 2 digits \$60
 1 digit \$6
 Payoffs on \$1 bet any order
 4 digits \$1,242
 First 3 digits \$232
 Last 3 digits \$695
 RI SUNDAY MIDDAY 5-7-6-1
 RI SUNDAY EVENING 7-8-8-5
 Drawn Sunday
 MASS CASH 3-9-15-21-27
 Monday's lottery numbers will be in Wednesday's paper.

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HOSPITAL

From Page A1

Broach said he fears the hospital could be busier the second time around.

Although doctors have

gotten better at treating patients as the pandemic has progressed, a surge in cases in the state and country has health officials concerned.

As it was during the first surge in spring, Worcester's field hospital is the first to open in the state this second

round.

Field hospitals are important because they free up space in hospitals that could become vital if case counts continue to worsen.

They allow hospitals to focus on the most serious cases, as well as continue

to serve non-coronavirus patients.

Gov. Charlie Baker indicated this week that a second field hospital would open in Lowell, with other officials saying a third could open in the western part of the state.

Figures released Saturday

show an estimated 54,199 cases across the state — about 12,000 more cases than there were last Saturday.

Baker this week said the state expects to receive about 300,000 doses of the first COVID-19 vaccines in the weeks to come.

The Standard-Times

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