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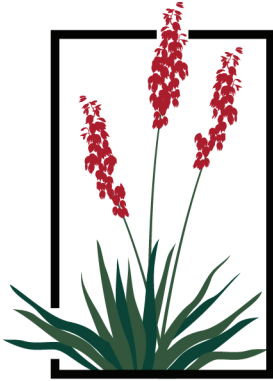
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HEALTH



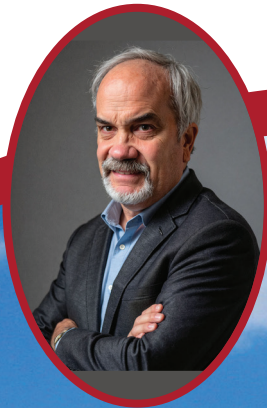
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Robots in the OR point to future

MIKE COOK

For the Bulletin

Greater dexterity and enhanced range of vision for the surgeon and less risk and less pain for the patient are just some of the reasons robotic surgery is becoming more and more prevalent, Dr. Surjit Reddy Moolamalla said. And he should know: A board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist at MountainView Regional Medical Center, Reddy Moolamalla has performed more than 1,200 robotic surgeries in the past seven- to eight years.

Robotic surgery is “a minimally invasive type of surgery in which the physician uses the tiny and precise ‘arms’ of a special surgical tool, (which) can operate through incisions that are too small for the physician’s fingers,” according to MVRMC.

In addition to requiring a smaller incision than conventional surgery, robotic surgery is safer because there is less risk of infection and less blood loss for the patient, Reddy Moolamalla said. He has also had “better clinical outcomes” with robotic surgery because it means less pain and a shorter hospital stay. And robotic surgery takes less time to perform: 15-20 minutes on average for the surgeries he performs, Reddy Moolamalla said, and

“30 minutes max,” which is about one-third of the time a similar conventional surgery would take.

Some robotic surgeries can even be performed on an outpatient basis, said Reddy



Dr. Surjit Reddy Moolamalla, second from right with trophy, and his team at MountainView Regional Medical Center celebrate an award marking the surgeon's 1000th surgery using robot technology.

Photo courtesy of MountainView Regional Medical Center

Moolamalla, which can save the patient money. With robotic surgery as an option, Reddy Moolamalla said he hardly ever makes referrals to surgeons outside of Las Cruces. “I keep my patients here,” he said.

Using a \$1.5 million robotic platform, Reddy Moolamalla

said robotic surgery has helped him conduct complicated and intricate hysterectomies, along with prolapse surgeries, cystectomies and other gynecologic procedures.

Reddy Moolamalla said he keeps improving his skills with the new technology, regularly attending conferences and watching videos to “keep learning” as robotic surgery advances and improves.

Reddy Moolamalla said patients are placed under full anesthetic for robotic surgery, and when he discusses it as a treatment option, the question he often gets is, “You will be in the room, right?”

Robotic surgery is likely to be the future for “almost all surgeries,” Reddy Moolamalla said.

Reddy Moolamalla has a medical degree from Gandhi Medical College in Secunderabad, India and completed residencies at Texas Tech University Health Science Center in El Paso. He worked in Alamogordo before coming to Las Cruces, and has been at MountainView for 12 years, the hospital said. Reddy Moolamalla said he and his family chose “to make this our home” because Las Cruces is “less busy” with “more of a community approach.”



Dr. Surjit Reddy Moolamalla

Photo courtesy of MountainView Regional Medical Center

THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

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Photo courtesy of MountainView Regional Medical Center

District welcomes school-based health centers

ALGERNON D'AMMASSA
Las Cruces Bulletin

Las Cruces Public Schools Superintendent Ignacio Ruiz and school board members joined the leadership of La Clinica de Familia in October to celebrate the opening of three school-based health centers, with more in the works.

A ceremonial ribbon cutting was held on Friday, Oct. 25, outside one such facility on the campus of Picacho Middle School, 1040 N. Motel Boulevard. Located in its own building facing the parking lot, the center includes an examination

room, a private office for consultations, a pharmacy and a room for community events or larger meetings.

Similar facilities also opened at Lynn Community Middle School and Mesilla Park Community Elementary School.

“These centers will serve as hubs for both physical and behavioral health care, ensuring that our students, families and staff have access to the services they need,” school board president Teresa Tenorio said during the ceremony.

Ruiz said the health centers are part of a broader effort across the

district to provide “wraparound services” to students and their families, and made reference to the recent opening of a family support center at the district’s central office.

“When we provide these type of supports, when we look at these wraparound supports, it’s going to impact not only the current state of our students and their academic outcomes, but also their future and

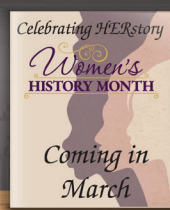


Las Cruces school board member Pamela Cort and a Picacho Middle School student cut the ceremonial ribbon at a school-based health center at the school on Oct. 25, 2024. Among those looking on is Las Cruces Mayor Eric Enriquez (behind Cort) and, at right, Las Cruces Public Schools Superintendent Ignacio Ruiz. Las Cruces Bulletin Photo By Algernon D'Amassa

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their families as well,” he said.

Kristin Oreskovich, an adolescent health coordinator with the New Mexico Office of School of Adolescent Health, said 25 percent of students who use school-based health centers do not access health care elsewhere, and cited research from the state Public Education Department that correlates the health centers with increased school attendance and graduation rates.

The centers are funded with federal COVID-19 relief dollars as well as a grant La Clinica de Familia was awarded

by the state to supply equipment, furnishings and staff to the centers.

La Clinica de Familia’s area practice manager, Ernesto Robles, said efforts to establish the program began in 2022 and that sufficient funding had been secured to support 17 school-based health centers between the Las Cruces Public Schools and the neighboring Gadsden Independent School District.

“We will be following the hub and spoke model, where the hubs are those clinics who will physically house the medical and behavioral health providers, and

the spoke sites will be served through telehealth services,” Robles said, mentioning Las Cruces-based Electronic Caregiver as a partner in the program.

“Having healthy children makes our community stronger because they are the future of our state,” Robles continued. “By healthy, I mean that every child in New Mexico should have access to nutritious food, clean water, housing and access to medical and behavioral health services.”

Crisis Triage Center opens with new operator

BULLETIN REPORT

Doña Ana County's Crisis Triage Center reopened for service on Jan. 1 under a new operator. Tennessee-based Summit Behavioral Health, owner of PEAK Behavioral Health, has assumed

responsibility for "immediate and comprehensive care for adults 18 and over who are experiencing mental health or substance use crises," according to a news release from Doña Ana County.

The center had been shuttered for nearly a year since closing on Jan. 31, 2024, when the county parted ways with the previous provider, RI International.

"The CTC will again be available for us, our family and friends when we are having a bad day and need some help, and instead of emergency rooms for more urgent situations," Jamie Michael, the county's Health and Human Services director, stated in the release.

The center is set for operating hours 24 hours a day, seven days per week, all year long, with care available regardless of insurance, the county said, with services including clinical intervention, assessment, medical administration, referrals to higher levels of care and transportation.

The county said it would cover operating costs for the first six months, at a total of \$1.4 million, after which the center would be funded through Medicaid reimbursements, the county's general fund and its health care assistance fund.

In September, the county had committed to the \$1.4 million for the startup phase as well as \$2,868,988 in annual support.



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Magistrate Court, La Clinica team up on criminal competency

JUSTIN GARCIA

Las Cruces Bulletin

The Doña Ana County Magistrate court, which handles most lower-level criminal cases, announced a partnership last summer with a local mental health provider to connect some defendants with services.

La Clinica De Familia, a private, not-for-profit provider of physical and mental health in southern New Mexico, will offer support for people found not competent to stand trial, a new service that supporters say could reduce crime in the area.

“If they’re found incompetent, their case is generally dismissed, especially if it’s a misdemeanor, it will always be dismissed. And they’re never connected to services, and we see them a few weeks later,” New Mexico Supreme Court Justice Brianna Zamora said during a presentation on June 7.

Competency emerged as a significant focal point following the killing of a Las Cruces Police Department officer in February 2024. In the aftermath, police chief Jeremy Story highlighted competency issues as a necessary reform to protect police and public safety.

“Our officers see the same people every day. The judges see the same people every day or every week or every month,” Story said. “This program, I think, is a huge step in the right direction.”

According to Story, a handful of people in Las Cruces commit dozens of minor crimes like trespassing

and vandalism, are found incompetent and continue to commit more crimes.

Competency, mental health in the courts

A bill that supporters said would have connected those found not competent to mental health services died during the 2024 legislative session. Opponents said the bill was underbaked and not well-conceived. Another effort is expected during the current 60-day legislative session.

Competency refers explicitly to defendants who do not possess the understanding to assist in their defense. When a person cannot determine where they are and what’s happening, they cannot be tried in a criminal court in New Mexico or anywhere else in the U.S.

While competency has its roots in some of the earliest legal texts in human history, the modern conception comes from a 1960 U.S. Supreme Court case called Dusky v. United States.

The process for determining competency is relatively simple.

Anyone in the court, but typically the defendant’s lawyer, will question competency. The standard process stops at that point so that a psychiatrist can evaluate the defendant.

If the psychiatrist finds the person is competent, the case continues as usual. If the psychiatrist finds the person is not competent, the case must be dismissed. In capital crimes like murder, the person is essentially

imprisoned at New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute until competency is restored — at which point, the case against them can resume.

It’s difficult for the public to gather more information about how specific instances and questions of competency unfold.

Documents generated around competency questions and hearings to resolve them are closed to the public, an instance in which New Mexico courts prioritize privacy over transparency.

How will the program work?

Zamora said the program begins with a screening to determine whether defendants are “severely mentally ill” and whether competency issues have been raised in the past.

Then the person will receive an assessment before court staff connects them with counseling, treatment, and medication services. Zamora also said that it could include housing, food security and other basic needs.

After six months of this, the case can be dismissed—which would have happened regardless of whether they were found not competent.

“In my mind, each person, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has inherent worth,” Zamora said.

The program at the Doña Ana County Magistrate Court is a pilot program that Zamora said aims to spread across the state.



Taking a good look

New imaging technologies at Memorial Medical Center

ALGERNON D'AMMASSA

Las Cruces Bulletin

At Memorial Medical Center, John Garmong has watched medical imaging evolve over nearly 30 years.

Starting as a tech assistant in the radiology department, he remembers processing x-ray images in a darkroom and running the processed pictures back to the emergency room where physicians would clip them in front of bright lights.

Today, Garmong is the hospital's director of imaging services, responsible for acquiring and installing new-generation imaging technology, overseeing the construction and electrical infrastructure needed to support them and seeing that department has trained staff to deploy it.

To illustrate the advances in medical imaging and what it means for patients, Garmong took a reporter on a tour highlighting two facilities in particular.

A brand-new computed tomography or CT scanning machine was in the process of being installed, including a table on which patients will be conveyed through the scanner's circular opening.

While CT scans are nothing new for Memorial, Garmong said this unit will produce top-quality images more quickly and with less radiation exposure.

Previous generations of CT technology required multiple exposures (or "slices") requiring accurate alignment so as to provide a complete picture of the heart or other organs. Sometimes those "acquisitions" did not align, further complicating medical evaluations.

Where previous technologies assembled pictures in 64 slices, the new CT machine compiles 512 at once, allowing for high-resolution scans of entire organs at once.

"Now, I'm going to do the whole cardiac image in one

Staff of Memorial Medical Center peer through a new 512-slice CT scanner at the hospital's main campus in Las Cruces, Jan. 15, 2025.

Las Cruces Bulletin Photo By Algernon D'Ammassa



cycle of your heart ... all the data in one rotation, one beat of your heart," he said.

Garmong said he hoped it would reduce the overall number of diagnostic heart catheter procedures overall, "so that what we're doing in the cath lab is stuff that needs intervention, needs a stent, needs angioplasty, needs some sort of fix or repair." For many standard evaluations of the heart and arteries, he said the CT "can do it quicker, easier, faster, at far less risk to the patient."

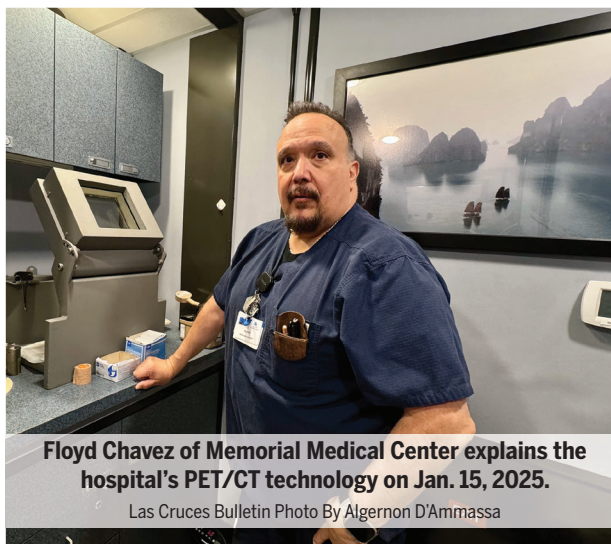
Meanwhile, in a trailer tucked into an alcove on the hospital campus, technologist Floyd Chavez, who staffs the hospital's full-time PET/CT unit, demonstrated the data-rich 3D views available to physicians through a combination of CT scanning of structures with dynamic imaging of chemical or metabolic activity in the body.

The latter is made

possible through the injection of a radioactive isotope that locates activity that may reveal the production of cancer cells or other activity identifying diseases of the heart, brain or other structures. The data also allows specialists to assess the best treatment options or evaluate how ongoing therapies are working.

"It opens up the doors to how you treat that cancer, that lesion, or whatever it's detecting," Garmong said. "It takes two really good modalities and fuses them together."

The investments also reduce the need for travel to El Paso or other cities for diagnostic and other imaging services, he noted, saving patients some time and expense as well as making diagnoses or answers about possible complications or the progress of treatment come sooner.



Floyd Chavez of Memorial Medical Center explains the hospital's PET/CT technology on Jan. 15, 2025.

Las Cruces Bulletin Photo By Algernon D'Ammassa

How to stick to your 2025 health commitments

Research shows that by the start of February, up to 94 percent of people abandon the new year's resolutions they made. In fact,

two separate dates have been coined "Quitter's Day" and "Ditch Your Resolution Day." Research shows that resolutions don't typically work, but commitments do.



Reframing your mindset and aspirations can be the key to finding success. According to a recent national wellness survey of more than 1,000 people by Life Time, a national health and wellness company with more than 175 athletic clubs and a complimentary digital app, 74.7 percent plan to prioritize their health in 2025, a nearly 20 percent increase from last year.

With that in mind, Danny King, Director of Recovery and Performance at Life Time, offers five unique and creative tips to help you move through the year with success, whether you work out at a health club or utilize a fitness app.

1. Fulfill your interests: Look for a place or an app that offers programming to match your interests or goals now but also has variety to fulfill new aspirations or challenges as your comfort level grows. You may not think you can do a dance-based workout now, but you might want to in the future. The fun and novelty of new experiences can keep you excited about your workouts and goals. And trying a complimentary workout app can reduce intimidation too.

2. Buddy up: Find a buddy who shares similar goals or try a small group training experience — this could be a current friend or someone new you meet. Multiple studies prove you're much more likely to stick with a goal if you have a friend or a group to help keep you accountable.

3. One step at a time: Challenge yourself with mini goals, like trying a new machine each week or steadily increasing the amount of weight you're lifting. Check if your club or app offers progressive challenges to sign up for. For a leg up, Life Time has Dynamic Personal Trainers to support quicker gains (or losses) and keep you motivated.

4. Fuel up: Find a health club with a café or smoothie bar and commit to trying something new and healthy.



Life Time clubs have full fast-casual LifeCafe restaurants and an entire collection of pure, potent and powerful nutritional products and supplements that can also support your goals. And don't forget the

protein.

5. Reward yourself: Many health clubs offer amenities like saunas, pools, cold plunges and massage services. Life Time is the largest operator of salons and spas in the country and can be used for daily care and as a reward for sticking to your workout routine. Treating yourself to a relaxing session can be a great motivator.

Regardless of your health and wellness goals, a

commitment mindset and the right health club or fitness app will help you. Life Time's free app with workouts, meditation, strength programs and more is available

to anyone. King notes, "Whether in real life or digital, you want to look for a wide range of programs and services that are available for a variety of ages and abilities. We love this time of year when we can really help people find success."



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Tips to get children excited about exercise



Human beings need to engage in physical activity to stay healthy. But too many children are not getting the exercise they need. Only 50 percent of boys and less than 34 percent of girls between the ages of 12 and 15 are adequately fit,

according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Children who are not physically fit are at greater risk for chronic diseases. In addition, children who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of retaining that extra weight into adulthood.

involve physical activity. Kids will be moving while they play, which is a first step.

participate.

Did You Know? Children need physical activity as part of their overall health regimen. How much physical activity a child needs varies with age. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says children between the ages of three and five should be active throughout the day to ensure proper growth and development. This can be achieved by being physically active during play. Children and adolescents between the ages of six and 17 need to be active for at least 60 minutes each day, with that activity being moderate-to-vigorous in nature. The activities enjoyed should include a variety of aerobic, muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening exercises.

Getting children to exercise regularly can be an uphill battle with so many distractions, such as electronic devices, vying for their attention. But parents can explore the following ways to get children more excited about physical activity.

- Choose interactive toys. Select toys for kids that require movement. These can include sporting activities, scooters, bicycles, and even video games that

- Set an example. Children may be more likely to embrace physical activity if they see their parents exercising regularly. Adults can share their passions for activities that encourage movement, whether it is hiking, heading to the gym, swimming, or rock scrambling.

- Make it a contest. People can be very competitive, especially young children. If kids know there is a prize or reward attached to doing something, they may have more motivation to engage with it. Offer a prize to the person who can log the most minutes of physical activity each week.

- Make things social. The more people involved in an activity, the greater the chance kids will want to be involved. Therefore, invite their friends, cousins, classmates, and other relatives to

- Look for new ways to exercise. Plan vacations and day trips around an activity. Perhaps the family can learn how to surf or snorkel on a trip; otherwise, a trip to the zoo or a museum can involve a lot of walking.

- Find reasons to walk. Kids and parents can walk to or from school each day to get exercise. Parking further away from stores ensures some extra steps as well. Take the stairs in malls instead of elevators or escalators.

- Encourage participation in team sports. Afterschool athletics often involve multiple days of practices and games or meets, which can be all the exercise a kid needs to be healthy. Athletics also present a fun way to exercise with friends.

Kids need physical activity to stay healthy, and there are various ways to make them more inclined to be active.

How to help kids lose weight safely

Many people struggle with weight over the course of their lifetime. A study noted in a report in the Wall Street Journal indicates the obesity epidemic is global. Around 2.1 billion people across the globe, or roughly one-quarter of the global population, is obese. Although overweight and obesity are issues for adults, they also affect children.

Children gain weight as they develop and grow, so it can be challenging to tell if weight gain is problematic or simply something that will resolve on its own as a child grows. Parents and other caregivers want to ensure their children are fully healthy, and maintaining a healthy weight is vital to such efforts. However, WebMD says there is no single number on the scale that indicates if a child is healthy. What constitutes a healthy weight varies depending on age, gender, height, and other factors.

It is important for parents to speak with a health care provider first to determine if a child needs to slim down or simply maintain the current weight as he or she grows taller. If it is recommended that the child lose some weight, there are various safe and healthy ways to go about it.

Make small changes

Small changes can add up to big results. For example, if a child is consuming a lot of fruit juice, start slowly by diluting the juice with water and eventually switch over completely to water. Change white bread in lunches to a whole-wheat alternative that has more nutrients and fiber.



Encourage sleep

A child's weight can be affected by the amount of sleep he or she is getting each night. Insufficient sleep can contribute to weight gain, indicates the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. The Canadian Paediatric Society says children need 12 to 16 hours of sleep a night as infants, and that need gradually decreases until adolescence, when youngsters need between eight and 10 hours a night.

Encourage physical activity

Children need physical activity to maintain a healthy weight. There is no magic formula to weight loss; the amount of calories burned should exceed the calories consumed. That can be achieved by helping children get the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day, according to the American Heart Association.

Revise family recipes

If everyone in the family is a bit overweight, chances are the menu needs changing. It's not hard to revamp recipes to be more nutritious. Taking the skin off of poultry; eating more lean protein sources like seafood and beans; using low- or no-fat dairy sources instead of whole milk versions; and swapping whole grains for refined grains is a good start.

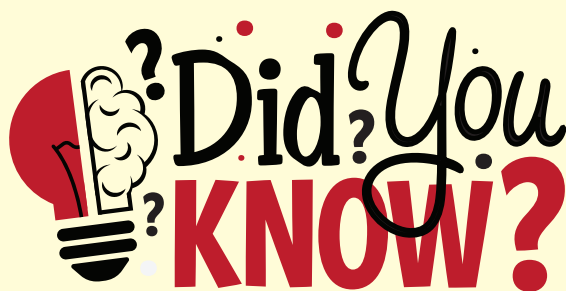
Limit consumption of fast and processed foods

Families are busy and it can be easy to go through a drive-through or pick up convenience meals at the supermarket. But many of these foods are high in calories, saturated fat and sodium. Families should limit these types of foods and seek healthier alternatives.

Don't snack and watch (or surf)

It's easy to overeat when eating while watching television or scrolling through social media. Limit screen time and enjoy meals uninterrupted by digital distractions.

Kids may need a little help finding the tools to lose weight and some encouragement and cooperation as they seek to develop healthy eating habits.



The World Health Organization reports that hundreds of millions of children across the globe qualified as overweight or obese in 2022. According to the WHO, in 2022 37 million children under the age of five were overweight, while 390 million children and adolescents between the ages of five and 19 met the criteria for being overweight or obese. The WHO considers a child under five years of age overweight if the youngster is weight-for-height greater than two standard deviations above the organization's Child Growth Standards median. The WHO criteria for being characterized as obese is met when a child is three standard deviations above the median. Children and adolescents between the ages of five and 19 are considered

overweight if they are one standard deviation above the median and obese if they are two standard deviations above the median. The threats posed by overweight and obesity in childhood are significant. The WHO notes that being overweight as a child and adolescent is associated with earlier onset of various noncommunicable diseases, including type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In addition, the WHO notes the adverse psychological consequences of being overweight or obese in childhood and adolescence, which include a lower quality of life that is compounded by stigma, discrimination and bullying.



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