



WESTCHESTER PHYSICIAN

January 2025

Volume 41, Issue 1



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TRUMP'S HEALTH TEAM: LOYALTY, EXPERTISE, AND THE QUEST TO 'MAKE AMERICA HEALTHY AGAIN'

Kham Ali, MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP, President

As President Donald Trump steps back into office for a second term, he has handpicked a new health team poised to take on some of the nation's most pressing health challenges. These individuals, from Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, have not only garnered their share of attention for their strong policy stances but also for their deep loyalty to Trump. Though each of them brings unique expertise and personal convictions, their potential to reshape American health policy remains uncertain, especially when navigating the complex web of political, medical, and public opinion.

Here, we dive into the backgrounds of these nominees—Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Dr. Marty Makary, Dr. Mehmet Oz, Dr. Janette Nesheiwat, Lee Zeldin, Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, and David Weldon—and explore how their beliefs and past actions could inform their leadership roles, while also noting where their perspectives align with, or differ from, Trump's well-known views.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.: Environmental Lawyer and Vaccine Skeptic with a Vision for Health Reform

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., nominated to head the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is a figure known for his environmental activism and controversial stance on vaccines. Kennedy, the son of the late Robert F. Kennedy and nephew of former President John F. Kennedy, has built a career focusing on environmental protection and fighting corporate corruption. As the founder of Children's Health Defense, Kennedy has been a vocal advocate against the use of vaccines, particularly in regards to the debunked claim that vaccines cause autism—a position that has drawn criticism from many in the scientific community.

Despite his contentious history, Kennedy has distanced himself from these views in recent years, particularly as he sought confirmation for the HHS role. During his Senate confirmation hearings, Kennedy reiterated his support for vaccines, stating that he would not advocate

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**KHAM ALI, MD, MBA,
MPH, FACEP**
President, WCMS

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WESTCHESTER PHYSICIAN

Published by the
Westchester County Medical Society
45 Beekman Avenue, Unit 727
Sleepy Hollow, NY 10591
914.967.9100

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**FROM THE EDITOR...
STORIES!
PETER ACKER, MD**



Somerset Maugham, prolific author of numerous stories, novels and plays, went to medical school before embarking on a writing career. He wrote an essay in which the first line reads: "I can think of no better education for a writer than to go to medical school." It makes a lot of sense. As we are taught in medical school, the diagnosis is most commonly found in the words of the patient (or patient's parent!). Taking a careful history is paramount. Primary care doctors have stories by the dozens brought to them every day. Some of Maugham's first stories were inspired by things he heard while seeing patients. (No worries about HIPAA back then!)

I thought of him today as I drove to Maria Fareri hospital this morning to see a patient. What made me think of him? Because of a story, of course. Two days before I had seen a 9 month old in my office with some fever and cough. His breathing was comfortable and his exam was reassuring. I did a PCR test which ruled out Covid and flu, but was positive for RSV. I counseled the parents to keep in close touch and to monitor his breathing and oral intake. The next day he seemed more ill to the parents, so I had him return. Now on exam, there was wheezing and mild respiratory distress. Because of his age and diagnosis, I sent him to the hospital. Because of a lack of hospital beds, he spent then night in the Emergency Room.

The reader is wondering I'm sure, what is so remarkable about this story? Here is what struck me. Thirty five years ago, I was a young pediatrician, having been in practice just two years. My two year old daughter contracted chicken pox. This was before a vaccine was available. She appeared to be recovering nicely until the Sunday night on Memorial Day Weekend. The fever returned and she began to become lethargic. She developed a rash that initially looked like a mild sunburn, but slowly intensified. As it so happened, I was on call for my group. I was suddenly in a mild panic and went to my books to look up toxic shock syndrome. No, no I said to myself, you're over reacting, and I dithered for a while, until my wife, a non-physician came to me and said, "Will you call one of your partners or should I?" Twenty minutes later my senior partner was at our house and within minutes were on the road to the medical center (*this was before it became Maria Fareri, a story in itself. In 1995 Maria, at 13, succumbed to rabies. She was treated at the medical center. After her tragic death, the parents discovered that their daughter as part of a school project had made a special wish – the health and well-being of all children. The parents helped lead the design and creation of the hospital*). There, my daughter was quickly evaluated and two IV's were started. Because of a lack of beds she was in the ER all night. She stabilized and was in the hospital for a week and fully recovered. My god, I thought, the only case of Toxic Shock Syndrome I have ever seen.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE **TRUMP'S HEALTH TEAM: LOYALTY, EXPERTISE,** **AND THE QUEST TO 'MAKE AMERICA HEALTHY** **AGAIN'**

Kham Ali, MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP, President
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any policies that discourage vaccination. However, his long-standing advocacy against pharmaceutical companies and his skepticism toward government agencies like the FDA and CDC could set him on a collision course with established public health frameworks.

Beyond vaccines, Kennedy has made bold statements about addressing America's chronic disease epidemic, citing the role of food additives and ultra-processed foods in driving rising rates of conditions like diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. While this is an area where his focus aligns with growing public health concerns, his call for sweeping reforms in the food industry and critiques of the pharmaceutical industry could run counter to Trump's relationship with business leaders in those sectors. Trump, known for his support of deregulation and strong ties to corporate America, may find Kennedy's approach to these industries challenging to implement.

Dr. Marty Makary: Surgical Expertise **Meets Health Policy Reform**

Dr. Marty Makary, nominated to head the FDA, is a renowned surgeon and health policy expert who has spent much of his career advocating for transparency and accountability in healthcare. Makary is perhaps best known for his work on medical errors, having published the influential book *Unaccountable*, which critiques the lack of transparency in U.S. hospitals. His focus on reducing medical errors, improving hospital accountability, and making healthcare more affordable resonates with the broader public desire for change in the medical field.

However, Makary's critiques of the FDA's role in the regulation of pharmaceuticals and food additives raise potential areas of conflict. He has called for a fundamental overhaul of the FDA, seeking to make the agency more transparent and less influenced by the pharmaceutical industry. While Trump has often been a vocal defender of pharmaceutical companies, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Makary's approach could put him at odds with this stance.

His commitment to reducing the influence of Big Pharma could prove controversial in an administration that has relied heavily on the industry for support.

Makary's stance on the high costs of healthcare and his call for greater regulation of the food supply also bring him into alignment with public health advocates. His focus on eliminating unnecessary medical procedures, reducing hospital inefficiencies, and advocating for more affordable healthcare might make him an appealing figure to those frustrated with the state of healthcare in America.

Dr. Mehmet Oz: The Celebrity Doctor **with a Pharma Connection**

Dr. Mehmet Oz, Trump's nominee to head Medicare and Medicaid, is a widely known figure, primarily for his role as a health expert on *The Dr. Oz Show*. Oz's popularity has been built on his ability to take complex medical issues and present them to a mass audience, often recommending supplements, diets, and treatments that have ranged from the cutting-edge to the questionable. While his background as a physician lends him credibility, his promotion of controversial "miracle cures" and unproven weight loss supplements has made him a lightning rod for criticism.

Oz's financial ties to the medical device industry, particularly his connection to the MitraClip heart valve device, raise questions about his impartiality when it comes to overseeing Medicare and Medicaid, the two largest public health programs in the U.S. His advocacy for these devices, which have faced recalls, could come under scrutiny if he is confirmed. However, his celebrity status and deep connections within the healthcare industry may work in his favor, particularly with Trump, who has never been shy about his affinity for celebrity figures.

Oz's leadership of Medicare and Medicaid could also pose a challenge due to his lack of significant policy experience in the realm of healthcare administration. His past career has primarily been focused on public-facing health advice rather than the nuts and bolts of healthcare reform, raising concerns about his ability to navigate the complexities of the programs that cover millions of Americans.

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Dr. Janette Nesheiwat: A Fox News Doctor Who Knows Vaccines but Opposes Mandates

Dr. Janette Nesheiwat, nominated for Surgeon General, brings a wealth of experience as an urgent care physician and media personality. Having frequently appeared on Fox News, Nesheiwat has become a trusted voice on health topics, including her advocacy for the COVID-19 vaccine. However, while she supports vaccines, Nesheiwat has been a vocal opponent of vaccine mandates, arguing that personal freedom should be prioritized over government-enforced health measures. This aligns with Trump's stance on vaccine mandates, which he has consistently opposed during the pandemic.

Nesheiwat's views on health are rooted in prevention and holistic care, advocating for a balanced diet, exercise, and early intervention. Her emphasis on empowering individuals to take control of their own health could align well with Trump's more individualistic approach to public health. While her promotion of dietary supplements and unregulated health products may not align with the views of some in the medical community, it fits with Trump's general tendency to favor deregulation in health-related industries.

Despite her media persona and strong stance on vaccines, Nesheiwat's views on the role of government in healthcare might make her a less polarizing figure within Trump's administration. She represents a blend of traditional medical expertise and conservative health policy that resonates with Trump's base.

Lee Zeldin: Business-Friendly with Environmental Concerns

Former Congressman Lee Zeldin has been nominated to lead the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Zeldin, a strong proponent of deregulation,

has long advocated for reducing the size of government and minimizing environmental regulations in favor of boosting economic growth. His approach to the environment has often favored industry interests, particularly in sectors like energy and construction, where less stringent regulations are often seen as an economic boon.

Zeldin's stance on environmental regulation may conflict with public health experts who argue that a lack of oversight can exacerbate chronic diseases linked to pollution, such as asthma, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. However, his close alignment with Trump's pro-business agenda ensures that his policies will prioritize economic growth over stringent environmental safeguards. Zeldin's leadership of the EPA will likely be focused on reducing bureaucratic red tape and creating an environment that is conducive to business, though whether this will come at the expense of public health remains to be seen.

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya: The COVID-19 Skeptic Who Wants to Tackle Chronic Disease

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, nominated to lead the NIH, is perhaps one of the most controversial figures in Trump's health team. Bhattacharya, an economist and physician, gained national prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic for his role in authoring the Great Barrington Declaration, which advocated for a more focused approach to protecting the elderly and allowing the rest of the population to develop herd immunity. His skepticism toward lockdowns and strict public health measures put him at odds with many in the medical community, but his views found an audience with Trump's base, which was often critical of the pandemic restrictions.

Bhattacharya's nomination to lead the NIH represents Trump's desire to shake up the agency and shift its focus toward chronic disease prevention. Bhattacharya's work on the intersection of aging, chronic disease, and healthcare reform positions him as a potential leader for NIH, particularly as he seeks to redirect the agency's focus away from infectious disease research and toward long-term health challenges.

While Bhattacharya's pandemic views may cause

(Continued on page 9)

STOP THE TRAIN Elliot Barsh, MD

(Links to articles mentioned are found in the body of this piece)

“The heart aches, the mind explains; the mind questions, the heart accepts.”

Hi everyone.

I hope you are bundled up and well.

A good relationship has a healthy balance of **trust** and **conflict**.

Our patients need to know that we can get the job done, **competence**; be accountable for what we say and do, **honesty**; and truly see who they are and what they need, **benevolence**.

These are the three components of **trust**.

At the same time, we both need to be seen and heard, **approval**; given choices, **control**; and feel safe enough to try, **security**.

These three issues lead to **conflict**.

Can our patients trust that we are strong enough to help them carry the burden of their illnesses?

Can they trust that our dedication to them will not be shaken by their illness, anger, fear, or vulnerability?

Do we have the confidence to invite their questions and let them challenge us so they can have the faith to doubt?

As Bruce Feiler writes in his book, *The First Love Story: Adam, Eve, and Us*,...

“...a true partner is one who can oppose us, challenge us, spar when necessary.

What makes a good sparring partner? Trust. Trust that the other isn't pulling any punches. And trust that you're both in the ring for the same reason: not to hurt each other but to grow.”

We need **challenging minds** and **accepting hearts** to awaken our hope.

Thanks for reading.

Be safe.

E

“See if you can learn at least one fact about each patient's life outside of the hospital by what you observe in their rooms.”

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Living their own lives helps doctors and nurses make better decisions about how to care for their patients.

“Are patients and clinicians getting what we want, or the only thing we can get?”

How Connected Are You to Your Doctor?

Patients with the strongest relationships to specific primary care physicians are more likely to receive recommended tests and preventive care, a new study found.

Are we having a real discussion that is mutual, responsive, and vital, or are we just “clicking the box”?

Afraid to Speak Up at the Doctor's Office

Patients felt limited to certain ways of speaking with their doctors, and many believed they were best served by acting as "supplicants" toward the doctor "who knows best," according to a new study.

WORKING TOGETHER by David Whyte

We shape our self
to fit this world
and by the world
are shaped again.
The visible
and the invisible
working together
in common cause,
to produce
the miraculous.
I am thinking of the way
the intangible air
passed at speed
round a shaped wing
easily
holds our weight.
So may we, in this life
trust
to those elements
we have yet to see
or imagine,
and find the true
shape of our own self,
by forming it well
to the great
intangibles about us.





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friction with some in the medical community, his focus on chronic disease and the need for innovative healthcare solutions could align with Trump's broader health agenda.

**David Weldon: A New Approach to the
CDC**

David Weldon, nominated to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), comes from a background in disease prevention and public health. While his nomination signals Trump's desire to restore the CDC's focus on chronic disease prevention, his lack of experience in leading large public health agencies could be a challenge as he navigates the bureaucracy of the CDC.

Like many of Trump's nominees, Weldon will need to balance business interests with public health concerns. Trump has often shown little concern for regulatory measures that might hurt industries like fast food and pharmaceuticals, but Weldon's role will require him to navigate these tensions carefully.

**Conclusion: A Diverse and Complex
Health Team**

Trump's health team for his second term is diverse in both background and policy approach. From Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s focus on food safety to Dr. Jay Bhattacharya's focus on chronic disease, these nominees offer unique perspectives on how to address the nation's health challenges. While their loyalty to Trump is unquestionable, the ways in which they will interact with each other, and with Trump's broader policy agenda, remain to be seen. As they work to "Make America Healthy Again," their ability to balance health reform with political reality will be tested every step of the way.

♦

*FROM THE EDITOR...***STORIES!****PETER ACKER, MD***(Continued from page 2)*

When I arrived at the ER, I was full of thoughts of that experience and I have to say, because of that experience, I think I can understand the parental suffering and worry when their child is hospitalized and just how long it takes to get over the emotional distress. The security guard greeted me and I found myself telling her the whole story of my daughter at this same institution. I entered the ER and found my patient in his father's arms with IV and nasal cannula in place. I was gratified to see my patient looking better and he stared at me intently. I then recounted to whole story to the father (his wife had gone home to take a shower). I then remembered that this father was himself a physician, an internist who had trained at Bellevue, my alma mater. Holy coincidence! We bonded over the shared experience and I advised to be prepared for the post-traumatic stress that can occur after the illness is long gone. By the way, my daughter is now 37 and practicing pediatrician and as far as I know she has only seen toxic shock syndrome once, in herself!

♦

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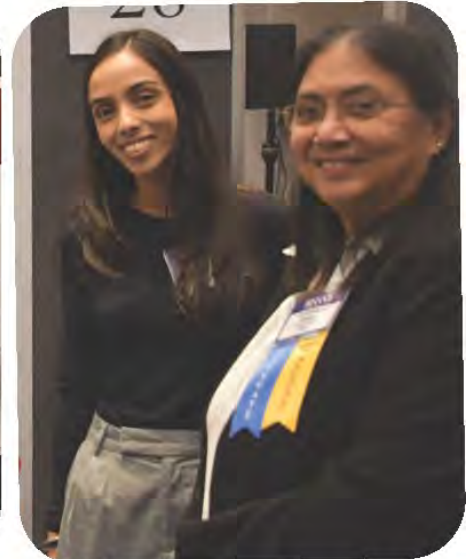
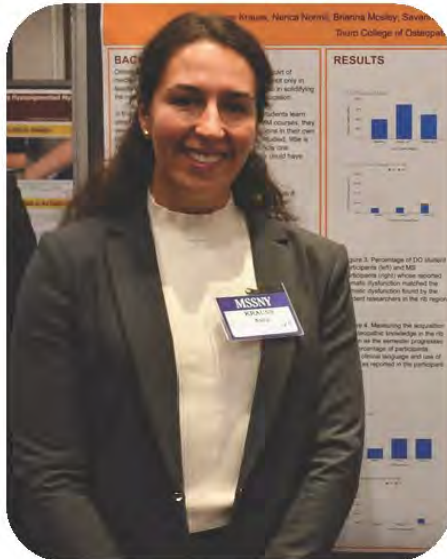
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NEWS RELEASE
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January 23, 2025

Contact: Christina Carroll
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HealthConnections Welcomes New President and CEO, Board Members for 2025

Elizabeth Amato steps into the top job, ushers in new community leaders to join its Board of Directors

SYRACUSE, New York – HealtheConnections, a leading health information organization in New York state, announces senior leadership changes effective January 1, 2025. Elizabeth Amato has taken the role of president and chief executive officer after three successful years as chief operating officer, preceded by Rob Hack, who retired at the close of 2024.

Amato, a 16-year veteran in the health information technology industry, is a respected leader in the field. She has an extensive background in health information exchange, health data, government relations, policy and compliance with focused expertise on program development and design, advocacy, research, and source funding.

In her new role, Amato will drive organizational strategies, priorities and operations, steering HealtheConnections into its next phase of growth. She is a passionate advocate for improving the health of our communities through innovative technology, data-driven strategies, and strong clinical-community partnerships, with plans to highlight those values during her tenure.

“Innovation, continuous improvement, and close collaboration with participants, partners, and peers are the hallmarks of HealtheConnections’ success,” said Amato. “My commitment is to preserve the values that have brought us here, while bringing new ideas and a forward-looking perspective to ensure our organization and partners thrive in a changing healthcare landscape.”

In addition to Amato’s appointment, the HealtheConnections Board of Directors selected new leadership and added a new slate of members to its ranks. The Board of Directors selects candidates that represent its extensive geographic reach, diverse participant base and business community united by a shared commitment to its nonprofit mission.

HealtheConnections Board of Directors leadership changes:

- **Paul Kaye, MD**, Executive Vice President for Practice Transformation for Sun River Health serving as the Board of Directors Chair
- **Seth Kronenberg, MD**, President & CEO for Crouse Health serving as the Board of Directors Co-Vice Chair





- **Robert Weisenthal, MD**, Ophthalmologist for CNY Eye Care and Clinical Professor for the Department of Ophthalmology at Upstate Medical University serving as Board of Directors Co-Vice Chair

New HealthConnections Board of Directors members:

- **Demetra Alberti**, Executive Director for Rural Health Network of South-Central NY
- **Kathryn Anderson, MD, PhD**, Commissioner of Health for Onondaga County
- **Eric Brosius**, Vice President of Technology Services for Sun River Health
- **Kara Hines, DNP, RN, CHCIO**, Associate Vice President of IT and Associate Chief Information Officer for United Health Services
- **Judith Watson, RN, BSN, MPH**, Chief Executive Officer for Westchester Community Health Center
- **Corey Zeigler**, Chief Information Officer for Helio Health

To learn more about HealthConnections, visit healthconnections.org.

About HealthConnections:

HealthConnections is a nonprofit organization accredited by the New York State Department of Health to operate the regional health information exchange that serves 26 counties across Central, Northern, Southern Tier, and Hudson Valley regions in New York State. With a network of over 13,000 licensed clinicians and tens of thousands of health and care professionals, the organization facilitates the secure flow of patient data between more than 4,600 office locations every day. This diverse and expansive network presents an incredible opportunity to share, understand, and apply clinical data for better healthcare and to support public and population health priorities.

To learn more about HealthConnections, visit healthconnections.org.

###

New York State's Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP):

*What Prescribers Need to Know About Ensuring
Their Patients' Safety*

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Faculty: Frank Dowling, MD

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- Explain NYS Public Health Law related to NYS PMP Registry and how it impacts prescribers

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