

# WESTCHESTER PHYSICIAN

June/July 2025

Volume 41, Issue 6

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE INCOMING REMARKS

Anaïs Carniciu, MD

Good evening everyone,

It's truly an honor to stand before you tonight as the new President of the Westchester County Medical Society. I want to begin by thanking each of you—our members, our board, our Executive Director Janine Miller, our honorees, and our community partners—for your commitment, your wisdom, and your shared belief in the mission that brings us together.

To our outgoing President, Dr. Kham Ali, I want to express my deepest gratitude. Your leadership over the past year—through both expected challenges and unforeseen ones—has been nothing short of inspiring. Thank you for your service and for leaving this society stronger, more engaged, and more visible.

## The Power of Local Medicine

In Westchester County, we have the unique advantage of being a microcosm of the greater medical landscape. I grew up in this community, and recognize the privilege of practicing medicine here. We have world-class hospitals and community health clinics, academic medicine and solo practitioners, innovators and tradition keepers. We serve a diverse and dynamic population, and we often find ourselves navigating the tension between modern medical complexity and timeless patient care.

In a world where medicine is increasingly driven by systems, scale, and algorithms, our county medical society reminds us that what truly anchors our profession is human connection.

Whether you're a radiologist reading hundreds of studies a day, a surgeon operating under the microscope, a primary care doctor managing chronic disease, or a specialist diving deep into a niche field, we all share one thing: the desire to heal, to advocate, and to serve.

I firmly believe that local physician leadership in medicine matters. It's here—at the county level—where policy meets practice, where we know the names behind the charts, and where we can work shoulder-to-shoulder on a grassroots level to make meaningful change.

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**ANAÏS CARNICIU, MD**  
**President, WCMS**

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## Upcoming Events:

### WAM Golf Outing

Tuesday, August 19, 2025  
Westchester Country Club  
Rye, NY

*Details in the newsletter pg 9*

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*FROM THE EDITOR...*  
**EVOLUTIONARY PEDIATRICS**  
**PETER ACKER, MD**



Primary care pediatrics performance involves doing the same thing over and over again. We do our checkups in which we ask the same kinds of questions about eating, sleeping, development, etc. The non-checkups, ie illnesses and injuries that punctuate our day are of the common quotidian type consisting mainly of only a handful of chief complaints, such as fever, cough or sore throat. Certainly on the face of it, this would seem to be a set up for burnout or at least occasional ennui. I remember years ago early in my career one day looking at my roster for the day, muttering to myself “same old same old”, just a few scant years out of residency, feeling world weary. Ah for the excitement of a busy urban emergency room with trauma and illness writ large. Luckily, I expressed these feelings to my older partner, Dr. Jeffrey Brown. He listened to me, a slight knowing smile playing on his face. After a pause, he counseled me to undergo a subtle attitude shift. Enter each examining room with the resolve to observe something new. Don’t look at each upper respiratory infection as exactly the same as every other, but how it may be different, or focus on a different aspect such as the parental attitude toward the child’s cold, or the behavior response. Sage advice!

Strangely, this seemingly simple advice really resonated with me and I learned to be more mindful as I entered each room, a subtle attitudinal shift in which I contemplated with a sense of wonder of what I might find behind the next exam room door. It increased my satisfaction and it caused me to think and contemplate in different ways about what I was observing day to day. Take the simple example of fever. Clearly a very common chief complaint, with a vast differential diagnosis in theory, but really confined to a small number of possibilities for the most part. Yet, there may be that occasional zebra that you always have to consider, like the case of South African Tick Borne fever that walked into my office one Saturday a few years ago. Then there is the focus on the parental attitudes toward fever and trying different ways to reassure a parent. It can be a difficult task because we have evolved into a species with a considerable ability to worry. I found it helpful to explore that a bit with parents, that feeling of impending doom that descends on a parent at 1 AM when they stare at the high reading on the thermometer. I often share with a parent that when my kids were young, despite all my “knowledge”, becoming startled when it was my own with a high fever. Throughout our eons of history up until the advent of the antibiotic era, fever often portended a fatal outcome. Our species survived due to phenomenal parental vigilance, fueled by a fertile and creative brain that allowed contemplation of any possible risk, of which the primitive world was fraught with. Of course, this ability to worry so deeply embedded in the deep recesses of our brains, is not always very functional as we do our worst case scenario analysis which tends to skew towards the rare and obscure. I have termed this parental tendency as being “parent oid”. I find it reassuring to look at this and explain to parents through an evolutionary lens and how it applies to other symptoms such chronic

*(Continued on page 13)*

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## 2025 Annual Meeting Westchester County Medical Society Westchester Academy of Medicine June 19, 2025



On Thursday June 19<sup>th</sup>, the Westchester County Medical Society and the Westchester Academy of Medicine held their Annual Meeting at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, New York. About 100 members and guests enjoyed an evening of fellowship with colleagues and family, great food, networking, and the opportunity to interact with WCMS preferred business partners and sponsors. Outgoing WCMS President Kham Ali MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP was thanked for his outstanding leadership and gave remarks on his time as President of the medical society (page 6). He also thanked his colleagues for all of their support throughout his year as President. Newly installed President Anaïs Carniciu, MD, an oculo-plastic surgeon in West Harrison, gave her inaugural remarks which can be found

on the front page of this publication. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Carniciu as our next President who began July 1, 2025. Dr. Carniciu has served as an officer of the Westchester County Medical Society for the past several years and has also served as the Chair of the Communications & PR Committee. We are happy to welcome Dr. Carniciu as our new President and wish her a very successful term.

A special presentation was made to honor Emil Nigro, MD as the 2025 “Friend of Medicine” awardee. In 1979 Dr. Nigro accepted a full-time emergency medicine position and in 1984 was selected as Director. He was at Phelps for 45 years and served his last 6 years as President of the Phelps Medical Staff. Over those 45 years the most recently recognized medical specialty, emergency medicine, evolved and improved in large part due to the partnerships that were created with first responders, fire, police, Westchester Department of Health, EMS agencies and county government.

Another special presentation was made to Elizabeth Amato, President & CEO HealtheConnections. She joined HealtheConnections in 2022 as Chief Operating Officer, where she led key initiatives across health information exchange services, data solutions, policy and compliance, business intelligence, communications, and customer engagement. Her effective leadership and strategic vision made her a natural choice to guide the organization forward, and she officially assumed the role of President and CEO at the start of 2025. Elizabeth’s vision is rooted in innovation, partnership, and progress. Her leadership is marked by a forward-thinking, mission-driven approach that keeps equity and impact at the forefront. Under her guidance, HealtheConnections is poised for continued growth to serve as a trusted partner in advancing better care, healthier communities, and stronger outcomes across New York State, including right here in Westchester County.

We would like to thank all of the event sponsors and attendees for making it such a great evening. Without all of you, the work we do would not be possible.

**2025-2026 WCMS Officers:** Anaïs Carniciu, MD, President; Daniel Gold, MD, President-elect; Bruce Mollinelli, MD, Vice President; Thomas Lee, MD, Treasurer; John Abrahams, MD, Secretary; Kham Ali, MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP, Immediate Past President & Peter Acker, MD, Academy President.



**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE****INCOMING REMARKS**

ANAÏS CARNICIU, MD, PRESIDENT

**A Bit About Me**

For those of you I haven't met yet, I'm an ophthalmic surgeon in solo private practice in Harrison. My daily work is focused, specialized, and often very detail-oriented—but standing here tonight, I could not feel more expansive in my mission.

It is one of the great privileges of my early career to represent all physicians in Westchester—regardless of specialty, practice setting, or years in the field. Whether you're employed or independent, inpatient or outpatient, just starting out or approaching retirement—this Society is yours. My role as President is to serve as a voice for all of us, and to ensure that each of us feels seen, supported, and valued.

**What We're Facing**

We are living and working in a moment of immense pressure in our profession. Burnout is no longer a quiet crisis; it's an epidemic. Prior authorizations, insurance denials, staffing shortages, EHR demands, and NYS bills that threaten to increase malpractice premiums are all eroding our time and morale.

Physicians are retiring early, medical students are choosing different paths, and even our most resilient colleagues are asking: "Is this sustainable?"

I don't pretend to have all the answers. But I do believe that this Society—this group of committed, brilliant, and compassionate professionals—can and must be part of the solution.

**Our Mission Ahead**

As your new President, I see my role as both a steward and a spark.

First, a steward: someone who upholds the legacy of this organization, honors the work of those who came before, and ensures that our core values remain unshaken: professionalism, advocacy, education, and ethics.

And second, a spark: someone who invites new energy, new ideas, and new members into the fold. Someone who isn't afraid to ask hard questions or to try something new.

Over the next year, I'll be focused on three main goals:

**1. Reconnecting and Rebuilding Community**

We have been through a collective trauma over the last few years. The COVID-19 pandemic tested us all—in our practices, our hospitals, our homes, and our hearts. As we continue to rebuild in a now increasingly complex medical landscape, one of our key missions must be reconnection. We need to support one another not just professionally, but personally. Through society membership, social events, inter-specialty collaboration, and open dialogue, we can rebuild a stronger, more cohesive physician community in Westchester.

**2. Strengthening Physician Advocacy**

This Society gives us a platform, but it's our collective voice that gives us power. Whether it's fighting for fair reimbursement, protecting the physician-patient relationship from corporate interference, or advocating for physician-led healthcare, we must remain vocal and visible.

Too often, decisions about healthcare are made without the physicians who deliver it being in the room. That needs to change. And it starts here—by organizing, educating ourselves on the legislative process, and showing up.

We will continue to work closely with the Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY), with our local government leaders, and with fellow healthcare organizations to ensure that the voice of the physician is heard—and respected.

**3. Supporting the Next Generation**

Our medical students and young physicians are watching us. They are learning not just from how we practice, but how we lead, how we balance, and how we speak up.

We have an obligation to mentor them, to protect their well-being, and to remind them that medicine is still a noble calling—even when the system feels broken.

We need to invite them into this Society—not just as guests, but as collaborators. Their energy and insight are exactly what we need to move forward.

**The Heart of the Work**

Beyond these goals—beyond any policy or program—I want us to remember the heart of this work: our patients. At the end of the day, this Society exists

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE INCOMING REMARKS

ANAÏS CARNICIU, MD, PRESIDENT

because patients need us. They need not just our clinical skills—but also our advocacy, our empathy, and our courage.

I've seen that courage in so many of you—working late, comforting families, pushing back against injustice, mentoring young physicians, adapting to our ever-changing field. I know that if we keep showing up, together, we will keep this profession alive—not just in body, but in spirit.

### Closing Reflections

So tonight, I thank you. For your dedication. For your presence. For choosing to be here—at this dinner, yes, but also in this profession. Despite all the difficulties. Despite the noise.

I hope you'll join me in the year ahead—not just by attending meetings or paying dues, but by engaging. Share your concerns. Bring your ideas. Invite a colleague to join. Mentor a student. Write that op-ed. Call your legislator. Advocate for your patients—and for yourself.

Because the future of medicine in Westchester is not a headline or a statistic—it's us. It's what we do next. I truly believe that if we lead with integrity, curiosity, and care—we'll not only sustain this Society, but we'll grow it into something stronger than ever before.

Thank you for this tremendous honor. I look forward to serving you and learning from you. Let's make this year one of impact, growth, collaboration, and connection.

Enjoy the rest of this wonderful evening.

Thank you.



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## IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE OUTGOING REMARKS

KHAM ALI, MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP

**Farewell Address:** Transitioning from President to Immediate Past President

Thank you all for being here today and for dedicating your valuable time to support this wonderful event and a cause that is dear to my heart. The Westchester County Medical Society and the Westchester Academy of Medicine are institutions vital to each and every one of us.

### WHY I SERVE

You might wonder: Why did I take on the task of becoming president of the Westchester County Medical Society? Kham, aren't you busy enough in your full time ER position, out of hospital ventures, or random graduate school adventures? Why would I spend my limited free time—and I have my ER director here, along with multiple board members who can attest that, like yourselves, I like to occupy every minute of my day. In fact, the only reason I can donate time to the medical society is because I don't sleep—I've somehow found 26 hours in the average work day.

All jokes aside, I became president and will continue to be intimately involved on the board, and various committees, as well as the House of Delegates because **this work matters**.

### WE HAVE A SHARED MISSION

I've said this before and I'll say it again: The medical society is a group of physicians, formed by physicians, who advocate for physicians and patients.

Looking around this room, I see:

- Hospital executives
- Physicians across all specialties
- Vendors providing integral services and products to our medical practices
- Community members supporting our goals and mission

Although we hold different titles and occupy different places within the healthcare infrastructure, we share a very clear goal: **We all want to make medicine better—for doctors and for**

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## IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE OUTGOING REMARKS

KHAM ALI, MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP

*(Continued from page 6)*

### patients.

Again, this is the goal of the medical society. This is a goal we can all agree is good. And when you look around the world today, there's not a lot of that good going around.

### THE CHALLENGE WE FACE

Medicine as we know it is changing at a breakneck pace. Despite wonderful advances over the past 200 years—where we've seen the average lifespan nearly double due to innovations in public health and fatal disease treatment—we now face a dystopian reality where expertise is no longer regarded, trusted, or in some cases utilized correctly.

Unfortunately, the current administration promotes anti-science views. Let me be clear: This is not about political party. This isn't about Democrat vs. Republican or any ism. This is about science which should be absolutely apolitical.

When the secretary of the HHS whose sole mission is to keep the nation healthy questions whether HIV is truly the cause of AIDS, and promotes the notion that poppers (amyl nitrates) might be the real reason for AIDS, we're in for a wild ride.

### WHAT WE CAN DO

During my presidency, I've spent considerable time writing—I encourage you to go back and pick a random article that may speak to you. I encourage you all to read, not because I'm the best writer, but because I write honestly and passionately about things that matter. I've written about:

- How artificial intelligence is transforming medicine and how I use it to create better work life balance
- Strategies to recognize and combat physician burnout
- The United Healthcare CEOs murder as a marker of a systemic sickness in America
- Rebuilding trust in Healthcare
- I've also written about this existential threat that we face from the anti-science movement

**HERE IS A BOILED DOWN VERSION OF MY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHYSICIANS: MEET PATIENTS WHERE THEY ARE**

We can learn from the COVID pandemic. Just as with a broad differential diagnosis—where you never remove something until you're absolutely certain—don't immediately dismiss your patients' ideas about their healthcare. If they're taking ashwagandha for their hypertension, try to engage in conversation rather than being dismissive. Encourage their exploration while stressing the importance of medical adherence simultaneously.

We must follow the science, but remember: **Science is not absolute.** It's an evolving body of knowledge that changes over time. As physicians and clinical scientists, we must:

- Be comfortable with uncertainty
- Acknowledge when things have changed
- Continue moving forward, be unafraid to change our opinion

Many things we believe about medicine today will prove incorrect, just as past beliefs have. I challenge you to shift from a paradigm of "right and wrong" to understanding science as a dynamic set of evolving principles.

### FOR ADMINISTRATORS: ENGAGE PATIENTS IN THE COMMUNITY AND HUMANIZE PHYSICIANS

Too often, physicians are looked at as robots, detached from the effects of the experiences and lives of our patients in our local communities. The office or hospital environment automatically creates this elevated, less accessible version of the physician that needs to be somewhat demystified. We need to support our front line physicians in community outreach events and more specifically within cultural or faith based groups and events. Seeing the "white coat" out in the wild, handing out water bottles during a race, attending religious processions, or staffing an information booth at a pride event would go a long way to build trust within these communities where local leaders are highly trusted. It might then be important to build alliances with these leaders to help their members steer clear of any of the pitfalls of anti-science or misinformation.

### For vendors and medical support services

Continue to defer to the experts. Support consensus opinion. Whether you have a medical title or not, a patient may take your opinion as supported by the medical body simply because you work in a

*(Continued on page 13)*



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## **Westchester Academy of Medicine hosts The Third Annual Bertrand-Pilkington Golf Outing & Fundraiser**

**Date—Tuesday, August 19, 2025  
Westchester Country Club  
99 Biltmore Avenue  
Rye, NY 10580**



**Registration, Driving Range & Halfway House Lunch  
Tee times will begin at 11:00am & will be assigned  
6:00 PM—Cocktails  
7:00 PM—Dinner and Raffles**

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**All proceeds will benefit the Westchester Academy of Medicine  
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Contact Kalli Voulgaris [kvoulgaris@wcms.org](mailto:kvoulgaris@wcms.org) or 914-967-9100 for more details.***

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**Golf Reservations are Limited—Please RSVP Today!**

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## STOP THE TRAIN Elliot Barsh, MD

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

**"Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune."** -Walt Whitman

Hi everyone.

I hope you are enjoying the freedom that summer brings.

What do we mean when we talk about *freedom*?

How do we *get it, embody it, live it*?

It is more than just the *absence of constraints*.

*Freedom is something we make room for.*

It is not about our *age* in years, or our *time* of life.

According to David Whyte, "*Freedom is perhaps the ultimate spiritual longing of an individual human being.*"

It is about the *moment* we start asking the right questions because we are ready for the answers.

Ready to *empty* ourselves and make room for more than who we are.

Not to lessen ourselves, but to know ourselves, and raise ourselves up knowing that we *belong* to something great.

To stop listening to what others say, begin to *hear* our inner voice and connect to ourselves and what we are a part of.

Freedom is having a healthy self-esteem and honest self-awareness.

We know our *purpose* and are ready to live it.

Thanks again for reading.

Bye for now.

Be safe.

E

"Can we feel like we belong in a space where we have no control?"

## The Joy of Swimming With Strangers

There's nothing quite like swimming with dozens of strangers — a joy that takes its purest form in New York City's public swimming pools.

"The healing was as much about finding compassion for myself as it was about feeling love for my daughter. Forgiving the woman who wasn't experiencing what she

was "supposed" to."

## How Could I Not Love My Baby?

What happens when motherhood doesn't feel the way you expect.

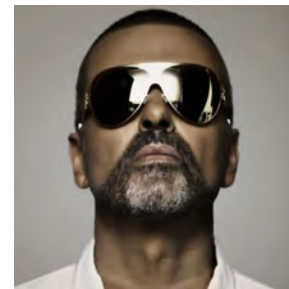
"We care because it is our purpose to care."

## Unrest

"Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me leading wherever I  
choose."

## Song of the Open Road by Walt Whitman

"Sometimes the clothes do not make the man"



**"They are not poems for the lips.**

**They are not pretty ideas for intellectual games.**

**They are not necessarily nice, nor particularly palatable.**

**They are answers.**

**They are meant to drive people into life with all they've got, squeezing out every moment and facing every challenge.**

**To show purpose in each thing.**

**They are answers because they are for someone who has a question.**

**Someone who experiences life and comes up against brick walls, things that seem futile and pointless.**

**They are meant to open windows, to shine light on each of those things and reveal its meaning.**

**Answers are never easy; they come to those who make room for them."**

-Menachem Mendel Schneerson





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FROM THE EDITOR...

## EVOLUTIONARY PEDIATRICS

PETER ACKER, MD

(Continued from page 2)

cough which also in ancient times was a sign of imminent peril (as recently as 1900, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in the United States).

I have applied this evolutionary analysis to aspects of pediatrics and child behavior, not in any rigorous academic way, but more as an interesting and entertaining way of speculating. For example, children's eating behavior, with its ability to drive any parent to despair. I am often struck by the sheer angst in the faces of mothers as they describe their child's refusal to eat. Once again, doing an evolutionary analysis: in olden days famine was always lurking and a parent's job was to feed and by god, if they don't eat now, there may get nothing later! Doctor, look at his ribs! Of course, in today's America, it is totally dysfunctional as we are witness to an obesity epidemic. Recognizing the origin of those inchoate anxieties can be helpful in toning them down a bit and allowing a child to eat when he is hungry, and not eat when he's not. Simple, huh? The child's refusal to eat green vegetables can also be analyzed from an evolutionary perspective – in a primitive jungle, avoiding a poisonous plant can be lifesaving. There are numerous other examples, which space does not allow me to get into, but watch for it in my next column!



## IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE OUTGOING REMARKS

KHAM ALI, MD, MBA, MPH, FACEP

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healthcare related field. I encourage skepticism but if you hold a skeptical view point, please try to keep that out of any patient facing interactions.

## YOUR HOMEWORK

Whether you're a hospital administrator, physician, or health services professional, I have three challenges for you:

1. **Build Trust:** Figure out how to meet patients in the middle. We need patients to trust medicine and science again.
2. **Stand Firm:** Steel yourself against anti-

science agendas. We're all human, fallible, and emotional. Don't let emotions or politics betray your oath to medicine and your patients. Don't confuse scientific discourse with dangerous conspiracy theories.

**Check In With Yourself:** At the end of your day—whether in the office, outpatient practice, or hospital—reflect. Ask yourself: How do I feel? We rarely ask ourselves this simple question. This missed opportunity is one of the largest contributors to burnout across all professions. The inability to self-monitor, self-regulate, and check in leads to exhaustion.

## CLOSING

Please take care of yourselves. And if you can, try to take care of someone else too.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president. Though I step down from this role, I remain committed to our shared mission of making medicine better for all.



Passing of the Gavel from Dr. Ali to Dr. Carniciu

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