MedStar Health | MEDSTAR GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Summer 2025

MedStarGeorgetownMD

With melanoma under control, Rick was able to trade hospital visits for guitar sessions.

Photo by Hilary Schwab

Innovative therapy brings hope to patients with metastatic melanoma.

By Ronda Borenstein

Rick Schneider feels both lucky and blessed–lucky that he chose to buy a home just a mile from MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in 1999, and blessed that, 20 years later, this proximity led him to seek care there when a diagnosis of metastatic melanoma threatened his life.

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Just right: Mom at high risk for breast cancer discovers options for charting her own course.

By Karen Hansen

Given her extensive family history of breast and ovarian cancer, Shannon Ingram always knew she'd take decisive action to safeguard her health.

"Shannon carries a BRCA1 mutation, which significantly increases her lifetime risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer," says Shannon's breast surgeon, Lucy De La Cruz, MD, chief of the Breast Surgery program and director of the Ourisman Breast Center at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. According to the National Cancer Institute, women with the BRCA1 mutation face a 55% to 72% lifetime risk of developing breast cancer, and a 39% to 44% risk for ovarian cancer.

But Shannon had reason for hope: Dr. De La Cruz also explained that a preventative bilateral mastectomy could reduce her breast cancer risk by 90% to 95%. So at age 48, with her childbearing and breastfeeding years complete, Shannon moved forward with a double mastectomy. And she learned that this path presented hopeful options to help her preserve a sense of normalcy and smoothly resume the joyful lifestyle she loved.

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Shannon took decisive steps to protect her health, motivated by her husband, three daughters, and the newest addition to their lively household, Scout the puppy.

Photo by Hilary Schwab

Inside.

Intraoperative MRI system guides successful surgery for Parkinson's patients.

By Ronna Borenstein

Rick (right) greets Dr. Kalhorn (left), whose use of intraoperative MRI helped guide a precise and personalized surgical approach. Photo by Silver Ridge Productions

It's not surprising that Rick Schena's response to Parkinson's disease has been remarkable, because Rick is a remarkable guy. With a military career flying electronic warfare aircraft, followed by 31 years as a United Airlines pilot and flight instructor, Rick is no stranger to challenges. Still, he credits the outstanding care he receives from the clinical team at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital for his progress in overcoming many of the debilitating challenges of his illness.

"I went to sleep with Parkinson's winning and woke up ready to fight back."
– Rick Schena

Rick's journey began more than 20 years ago when he started to notice subtle symptoms like tremors, stiffness, and difficulty sleeping. His Parkinson's diagnosis at age 54 prompted him to prioritize his health and retire from the airline. Rick was referred to neurologist Fernando Pagan, MD, director of the Movement Disorders program, medical director of the MedStar Georgetown University Hospital Parkinson's Foundation Center of Excellence.

"When I met Dr. Pagan, the first thing he said was, 'I think we can make your life a lot better,' and I knew I had found the right place and the right doctor."
– Rick Schena

Rick's first evaluation was with a nurse practitioner. "She understood me in a way no one else could," says Rick. "I walked in afraid, and 45 minutes later, I had hope. When I met Dr. Pagan, the first thing he said was, 'I think we can make your life a lot better,' and I knew I had found the right place and the right doctor."

Parkinson's disease is a degenerative neurological disorder that breaks down the brain cells responsible for movement. It results from a deficiency of a chemical messenger called dopamine.

"After trying all the best therapies we had, in the fall of 2024 we decided it was time to go with deep brain stimulation, or DBS," says Dr. Pagan.

"DBS involves very precisely placing electrodes into the brain and connecting them to a device called a neurotransmitter, or brain pacemaker, which is implanted under the skin, usually near the collarbone" says Christopher Kalhorn, MD, co-director of the Movement Disorders program. "By delivering electrical signals, the device can help disrupt the patient's abnormal motor symptoms. Rick was an ideal candidate because his symptoms were not well controlled with medication anymore."

Rick was pleased that his surgery could be performed with the only intraoperative magnetic resonance imaging system (IMRIS) in the region bringing MRI to patients in the OR without the need to transfer them out of the operating room. According to Dr. Kalhorn the system utilizes very high-resolution imaging that provides real-time guidance so the surgeon can implant the electrodes with submillimeter accuracy.

"It was another one of those incredible moments in my life," says Rick. "I went to sleep with Parkinson's winning and woke up ready to fight back."

"Rick has had a smooth recovery from surgery, and we have seen substantial improvement in his tremor and other motor symptoms and have been able to reduce his medication," says Dr. Kalhorn.

"It is extremely gratifying to be able to return function, movement, and quality of life and get these patients back to their families and the activities they enjoy," adds Dr. Pagan.

Visit **MedStarHealth.org/IMRISvideo** to find out more about the IMRIS technology.

To schedule an appointment, call **202-444-9012.** Visit **MedStarHealth.org/BrainStimulation** for more information.

The Eileen Ferrell Nurse Relaxation & Wellness Center creates space for rest and renewal. By Emily Marrs

Each day, the nurses at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital bring focus, empathy, and expertise to the work of caring for the whole person.

Celebrating the importance and skill of MedStar Georgetown nurses, forward-thinking philanthropic donors—including physicians, nurses, associates, patients, and families—gave more than $570,000 to help establish the Eileen Ferrell Nurse Relaxation & Wellness Center, which opened in May 2025.

Their support, combined with the leadership of Lisa M. Boyle, MD, FACS, president of MedStar Georgetown and senior vice president of MedStar Health, reflects the deep dedication of the community, both within MedStar Georgetown and beyond, to honor and uplift those who care for that community every day.

The Center serves as a vital area for nurses to refresh and refocus before, during, and after their shifts. To support all the good that nurses do each day, the Center offers guided meditation and relaxation classes, a built-in sound system and wide flat-screen televisions, comfortable furniture, and a workout area with Peloton bikes.

Beyond its wellness focus, the Center also serves as a tribute to its namesake, Eileen Ferrell, MS, BSN, RN, former senior vice president and chief nursing officer at MedStar Georgetown, whose pioneering leadership continues to fuel the extraordinary spirit of the MedStar Georgetown nursing teams today.

"Eileen's commitment to safety, compassion, professionalism, and coordinated care created a collaborative work environment where nurses have critically important voices in all levels of decision-making," says Dr. Boyle.

Eileen Ferrell, MS, BSN, RN (center), stands surrounded by MedStar Georgetown nurses and supporting team members who are proudly carrying the torch forward, better supported than ever by an organization that champions their wellbeing. Photo by Yenny B. Aleman

"The Eileen Ferrell Nurse Relaxation & Wellness Center stands in honor of Eileen's longstanding commitment to nursing excellence," echoes Jo Ellen S. Carpenter, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, CENP, who succeeded Eileen as senior vice president and chief nursing officer at MedStar Georgetown. "This space will showcase our dedication to supporting nurse wellbeing while they provide the highest quality of lifesaving care at our institution."

After nearly four decades of service, Eileen retired in 2023, leaving behind a legacy that helped define MedStar Georgetown as a leader in nursing excellence. She played an instrumental role in helping MedStar Georgetown become the first hospital in the Washington, D.C., area to achieve the American Nurses Credential Center (ANCC) Magnet® recognition in 2004. Hospitals that receive Magnet status exceed the highest standards of nursing excellence, leadership, and innovative care.

The 2004 recognition would be the first in a series of five consecutive Magnet designations for MedStar Georgetown—four of which were earned during Eileen's tenure. Less than one percent of hospitals nationwide have achieved five consecutive Magnet designations, emphasizing the drive at MedStar Georgetown to provide exceptional, compassionate patient care year after year.

"The Center will truly support our nursing teams as they continue to provide the care that supports the health and wellbeing of our entire community."

— Eileen Ferrell, MS, BSN, RN

"The immense amount of clinical work our nurses do each day, coupled with the emotional strength they demonstrate while providing complex and life-sustaining care, creates the need for a place of respite where our nurses can rest, relax, and recharge with nursing colleagues," Eileen says. "The Center will truly support our nursing teams as they continue to provide the care that supports the health and wellbeing of our entire community." This vision is made possible by the generosity of donors whose support provides lasting strength for the hospital.

"I am deeply humbled by the enduring spirit of our Magnet nurses," Eileen continues. "I am so grateful that our Wellness Center represents the true devotion we have to taking care of our nurses as whole people, in the Jesuit tradition of *cura personalis*."

To learn more about how your support can make a significant difference, visit **MedStarHealth.org/Support** or call **202-444-0721.**

With a family history of colon cancer, screening becomes even more important.

By Susan Walker

A timely screening found the polyp, and Sonja's back to her guitar and the full rhythm of her life. Photo by Hilary Schwab

When Sonja Sabita Teelucksingh noticed bright red spots in her stool, she brushed it off. When the color persisted, she could no longer ignore it. Her father had died of colon cancer, and her sister had survived it at 37. Now Sonja, an advisor to the CEO of the World Bank, worried she might be facing colon cancer too.

She'd been so busy that she hadn't made time for routine screenings, despite her family history. Life had pushed aside the things she loved—playing and writing calypso music, working out, spending time with the people she cared about—and now, something even bigger was at stake: her health.

Sonja made an appointment with the nurse practitioner at the MedStar Health clinic at the World Bank, who booked her for an immediate colonoscopy with Priyanka Kanth, MD, a gastroenterologist and director of the Gastrointestinal Cancer Prevention program at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, a program that focuses on patients with a high risk for gastrointestinal cancers.

"Because of my family history, I was very anxious and braced myself for both the test and the results," explains Sonja. "I thought about all the things I would do if my test was negative for cancer—getting back to my music, being more active, and spending time with the people I love. I promised myself I would lead a more balanced life."

"A very good outcome"

During the colonoscopy, Dr. Kanth removed a large, advanced pre-cancerous polyp. "It's fortunate that we found and removed this polyp when we did," says Dr. Kanth. "In a few years, it could have become cancerous, so this is a very good outcome. Because of her family history and the fact that her sister had colon cancer at such a young age, Sonja should have been tested earlier. I also recommended genetic screening to discover whether there's an underlying cause for her family history of cancer. That information can help Sonja build a cancer screening plan based on her personal risk rather than the guidelines used for the general public."

Although she had felt anxious beforehand, Sonja describes her colonoscopy experience at MedStar Georgetown as overwhelmingly positive. "I got my appointment quickly, all the staff were kind and gentle, and I felt really confident, respected, and supported when I was at my most vulnerable. Someone even waited with me while I was waiting to be picked up. I was blown away by the level of care and compassion."

Knowing your family history could save your life

Dr. Kanth emphasizes the importance of recommended colon cancer screenings, especially if you have a family history of colon cancer. "Talk to your family and find out if anyone has had colon cancer and when they were diagnosed. If they were younger, you may be eligible for earlier screening and possibly genetic testing. And most importantly, don't wait until you experience symptoms like blood in the stool. With colonoscopy, we can remove polyps and prevent cancer."

"All the [MedStar Georgetown] staff were kind and gentle, and I felt really confident, respected, and supported when I was at my most vulnerable."

– Sonja Sabita Teelucksingh

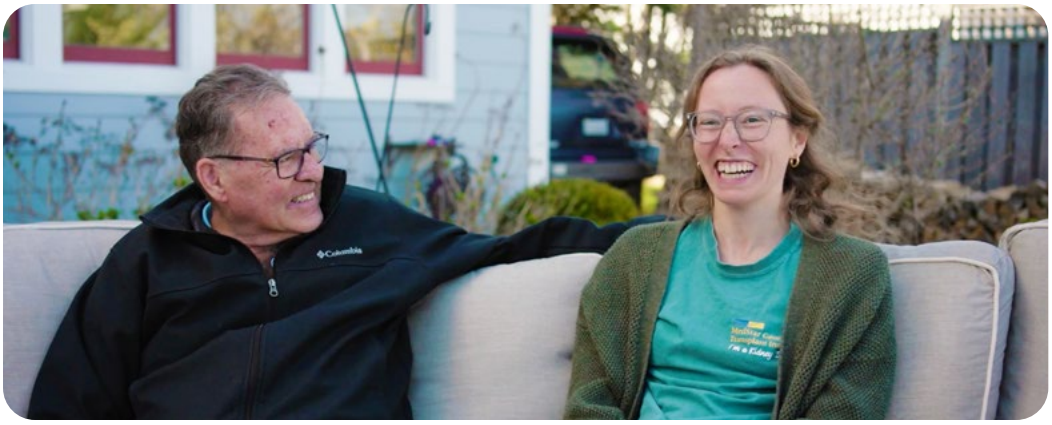
Today, Sonja takes a much more proactive approach to her health, making appointments for screenings and checkups she was behind on and making her health and wellbeing a priority. "Don't skip your cancer screenings and if you have symptoms, don't rationalize them away. You need to take control of your health. That's what I'm doing because the people who I love, and who love me, deserve nothing less."

Take our free colon cancer risk assessment. Visit **MedStarHealth.org/ColonHRA.**

For more information about GI services at MedStar Georgetown, visit **MedStarHealth.org/GIServices** or call **202-444-8541.**

A daughter donates her kidney and gives her father the gift of life.

By Susan Walker



Carrie says choosing to donate her kidney to her father Mark "wasn't a hard decision": it was simply a matter of when and how. Photo by Steve Bamonti, Generation Media LLC

The signs of impending kidney failure were something 65-year-old Mark Maggio knew all too well—fatigue, anemia, and declining kidney function blood test results. He had experienced these same symptoms about 40 years before when an infection caused his kidneys to fail. A successful deceased donor kidney transplant had given him not only decades of a healthy, active life, but had also brought Mark and his wife Anna Marie together. She was his nurse at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital when he had his first transplant.

"Dr. Al-Qaoud spent a lot of time with us, helping me prepare for my surgery and giving me a detailed and honest understanding of how I'd feel during recovery."

– Carrie Maggio

When his 30-year-old daughter Carrie learned her father needed a second kidney transplant, she did some research and learned about living donor kidney transplants. "I didn't know a lot about the medical advancements with eplet testing (a more precise way than blood type to see if a patient "matches" a potential donor) in kidney transplantation, but I did know I wanted to do whatever I could to help my dad," says Carrie.

The support of an experienced and caring medical team

Carrie went through the thorough donor evaluation process at MedStar Georgetown and learned she was able to donate to her father, so the surgeries were scheduled for the day after Christmas. Her donation surgery was performed by Talal Al-Qaoud, MD, a transplant surgeon and urologist who is part of the MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute.

"Dr. Al-Qaoud spent a lot of time with us, helping me prepare for my surgery and giving me a detailed and honest understanding of how I'd feel during recovery," says Carrie. "His support was extremely helpful. The nurses and all the medical staff were also very supportive and caring."

"Carrie gave her father the gift of life," explains Dr. Al-Qaoud. "Outcomes from living donor kidney transplantation have always been superior to those of deceased donor transplant, whether it's from a family member or non-directed donor. The fact that Carrie was a family member helps improve outcomes even more, since the donor and recipient are usually better matched. Every day, 34 people die or are removed from the transplant list due to kidney failure, and with a shortage of deceased donor kidneys, living donors like Carrie make a huge impact and save lives."

A father's gratitude for a life-changing gift

Carrie and her father both had successful surgeries: they're both doing well and back at work. Carrie's surgery was performed laparoscopically, an approach that results in less pain after surgery and just one night in the hospital. Mark was home only a few days later.

"I was up and walking soon after surgery," Carrie says. "My dad and I were on the same floor at MedStar Georgetown, so I was able to walk to his room and spend time with him."

"For my first transplant, I had to wait about a year and half for a kidney to become available," says Mark. "The wait is even longer now, so I am incredibly grateful for what Carrie did for me."

"My journey of making the decision to donate was driven by the fact that my dad could live a healthy life with my kidney," says Carrie. "It wasn't a hard decision to make."

Give the gift of life. Be a living kidney donor. Learn more about living donation at **MedStar Health.org/LivingDonorKidney** or call **202-444-3714.**

Meet Talal Al-Qaoud, MD

Visit **MedStar Health.org/AlQaoud** to learn more.

Just right: Mom at high risk for breast cancer discovers options for charting her own course.

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Restoring feeling with nipple-sparing surgery and Resensation®

With a husband, three daughters, two kittens, a puppy, a full-time job, and a love of the outdoors, Shannon's lifestyle is very active. She didn't want a lengthy surgery or a prolonged recovery. This ruled out the two traditional reconstruction routes: DIEP flap reconstruction, which uses abdominal tissue to rebuild breasts, or implants. Still, Shannon did not want to look totally flat. "I just wanted to keep a little bit of myself," she says.

Perhaps more concerning than how she would look, Shannon worried if she would still feel like herself. Because a mastectomy severs nerves that provide feeling to the breast, many women experience numbness and even a permanent loss of sensation in the chest area.

"When you go to MedStar Georgetown, you work with a team of doctors who help you find your path—and they treat you as a whole person every step of the way."

– Shannon Ingram

The impact can be profound—the inability to feel a child's hug, a partner's caress, or even the temperature of a shower—but Shannon's care team at MedStar Georgetown had solutions. "For Shannon, we employed a nerve-sparing approach during the mastectomy, and collaborated closely with plastic surgery to optimize outcomes for both aesthetic preservation and long-term resensation," says Dr. De La Cruz.

First, Dr. De La Cruz performed a nipple-sparing mastectomy (NSM), which preserves the nipple-areolar complex while removing all underlying breast tissue.

Shannon's decision to protect her health didn't mean giving anything up, least of all moments like this with her puppy, Scout. Photo by Hilary Schwab

In addition, Shannon qualified for yet another life-changing innovation. Kenneth L. Fan, MD, plastic surgeon, Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at MedStar Georgetown, is one of the few physicians in the Washington, D.C., area to perform Resensation—a technique that uses donor nerve tissue to reconnect chest nerves to reconstructed breast tissue.

While every patient's experience is different, many notice the return of light touch, temperature, or even pressure sensation within a year. For some, it's the small moments—like fully feeling a hug from a loved one—that signal something deeper: a renewed sense of connection, comfort, and confidence in their own body.

For reconstruction of Shannon's breasts, Dr. Fan helped her choose an approach that felt "just right." "We arrived at a solution called the 'Goldilocks' reconstruction. Using this procedure, we fold the remaining breast and skin on itself to create a breast mound, without adding a foreign body." Altogether, Shannon received a remarkable oncological solution, and something more.

"When you go to MedStar Georgetown, you work with a team of doctors who help you find your path—and they treat you as a whole person every step of the way," says Shannon. Dr. De La Cruz affirms, "We're committed to a functional mastectomy approach where cancer prevention is integrated with the preservation of a woman's sense of self. Through innovative surgical techniques, we strive to restore not just physical form, but also emotional and sensory connection, empowering patients to move forward with confidence and wholeness."

"Making this choice, you always have doubt and grief," Shannon says. "But when you have a team like I did, on the other side there's incredible relief and lightness—and space to think positively about the future, without worrying about not seeing my girls grow up."

To schedule an appointment or for more information visit **MedStarHealth.org/BreastHealthCenter**, or call **202-295-0541.**

Innovative therapy brings hope to patients with metastatic melanoma.

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Rick's resilience and the latest melanoma therapies brought him back to the activities he loves most. Photo by Hilary Schwab

"MedStar Georgetown's reputation for cancer treatment is huge," says Rick, "so it was an easy decision to choose them to help me in this life-and-death battle. To be able to access this amazing expertise so close to my home was a real gift."

After six years of battling cancer and failing with numerous interventions, Rick, 57 and the father of three, finally benefited from a new therapy that uses a patient's own tumor and immune system to fight metastatic melanoma. MedStar Georgetown is the first and only hospital in the region to offer tumor-infiltrating lymphocyte (TIL) therapy for patients with melanoma whose disease progressed on other therapies.

Rick's journey began with changes to a small mole on the back of his arm that he'd had throughout his life. The dermatologist who examined him suggested he return for periodic checks. Eighteen months later, a biopsy identified Stage 1 melanoma, but the disease rapidly worsened. Within a year, Rick received a diagnosis of Stage 4 cancer that had spread to his liver.

He scheduled a second opinion with Michael B. Atkins, MD, deputy director of Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center and co-director of the Melanoma Center at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital and the melanoma research program within the MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute.

"Dr. Atkins' approach to cancer was inspiring," notes Rick. "He tried several interventions for the cancer, and the treatment I received put me into remission for over three years. When it did return, I was never discouraged, because Dr. Atkins always had a backup plan. That's why, when the FDA approved TIL therapy, he referred me to another MedStar Georgetown rock star, Dr. Geoffrey Gibney."

"TIL therapy is a person-specific cellular immunotherapy," explains Geoffrey Gibney, MD, director of the Solid Tumor Cellular Therapy program and co-leader of the Melanoma Disease Group at MedStar Georgetown. "It involves extracting and reinvigorating a special type of white blood cell called T lymphocytes from the patient's tumor. Lymphocytes generally help the body's immune system fight infection and disease."

During the first step of TIL therapy, surgeons remove the tumor. Rick's surgical team included Shimae Fitzgibbons, MD, the primary surgeon. After the tumor is removed, it is processed in a specialized laboratory where the TIL cells from the tumor are grown in a culture to over 7.5 billion cancer-fighting immune cells. The TIL cells are then infused back into the patient to target and attack cancer cells anywhere in the body.

"TIL therapy for melanoma is a breakthrough therapy because it elicits responses in up to a third of patients where other therapies have failed," says Dr. Gibney. "This treatment offers incredible hope for patients with advanced melanoma, providing a chance for lasting remission and improved outcomes. It has the potential to extend life and improve quality of life in ways we have never seen before."

"This treatment offers incredible hope for patients with advanced melanoma, providing a chance for lasting remission and improved outcomes."

– Geoffrey Gibney, MD

The single infusion in October stopped the progression of the disease and changed the course of Rick's life. "I quickly bounced back," he says, "and was able to resume the activities I love, like hiking, biking, and skiing. I'm deeply grateful to Dr. Gibney, Dr. Atkins, and the entire oncology team for giving me the chance to enjoy a bright future with my wife and daughters. My advice for anyone diagnosed with an aggressive cancer is to go to MedStar Georgetown."

Research to advance the therapy to approval was conducted at cancer centers across the U.S., including Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center—the only NCI-designated comprehensive cancer center in the Washington, D.C., region. Additional research with TIL therapy and other T-cell therapies in a range of solid tumor malignancies is ongoing.

Visit **MedStarHealth.org/TIL** for more information.
To schedule an appointment, call **202-993-0492**.

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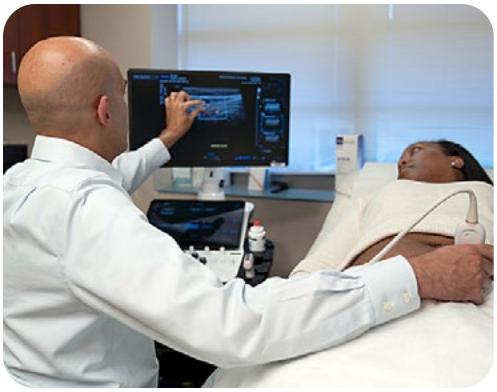
A new imaging option is helping IBD patients get answers more quickly, more comfortably, and without radiation.

By Justine Hudock



MedStar Georgetown University Hospital is proud to be the first in the region to offer bedside intestinal ultrasound (IUS) for patients with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

For the estimated 2.4 to 3.1 million Americans living with IBD, bedside ultrasound can track disease progression, guide treatment, and provide reassurance during symptom changes. This noninvasive tool helps gastroenterologists assess inflammation between colonoscopies without sedation, bowel prep, anesthesia, or recovery time. IUS is especially useful for assessing the colon and terminal ileum, the regions most affected in Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

"This new technology allows us to get answers right away, without any radiation involved," says Mark Mattar, MD, director of the IBD Center at MedStar Georgetown. "Since patients are awake, they play an instrumental role in this real-time assessment of their disease. It's a meaningful shift in how we care for individuals with IBD."

To make an appointment with one of our experts, please call **202-444-8541**, or visit **MedStarHealth.org/GIServices** for more information on our GI services.

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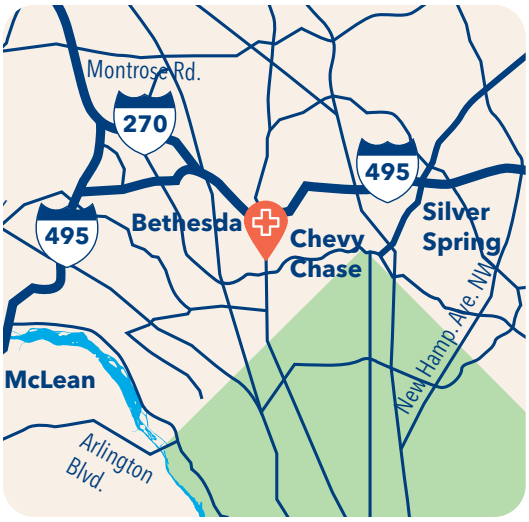
Expert GI care now in Chevy Chase.

Difficulty swallowing? Heartburn? Due for a colonoscopy screening? Get expert gastroenterology (GI) care close to home—now taking appointments for new and current patients at our Chevy Chase location.

MedStar Health Gastroenterology at Chevy Chase provides easy access to expert gastroenterologists and practitioners. Our Chevy Chase providers offer diagnosis and care for both common and complex GI conditions—from acid reflux to chronic conditions and colonoscopy screenings.

If you're 45 or older, don't wait: regular screenings are essential for detecting colorectal cancer early, when treatment is most effective.



Now taking appointments in Chevy Chase.
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To make an appointment, call **240-223-2330.**

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