



2024 06 20

Leadership Corner



*Neerav Sheth, MD
President*

Dear Colleagues,

I am humbled to have been elected as President of the Montgomery County Medical Society for the 2024-2026 session. As we are all aware, Montgomery County is a highly diverse county with much to offer. As a medical community, we are tasked with caring for a wide array of conditions ranging from those more common in rural / agrarian communities to those more often found in urban centers. We are faced with encroaching pressures from all sides including but not limited to venue shifting, scope of practice, hospital / health system consolidations, financial burdens due to decreasing payments and increased overhead from administrative burdens. These pressures can be daunting and lead us to burn out faster. Burnout leads to loss of empathy, chronic fatigue, development of medical conditions, and ultimately early retirement or leaving the practice of medicine in favor of industry.

My goals for my presidency are centered around these issues. Firstly, I'm going to focus on improving communication between the MCMS board, MCMS members and local organizations such as the Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Medical Society. Real time communication of public health and advocacy issues is vital to our community. We're looking to work with the Chamber of Commerce to start collating and developing resources to help physicians protect their practices. We're improving access to care of our patients by promoting prior authorization reform, decreasing unnecessary administrative burdens, and taking on venue shifting. We're going to work with medical staff at each of our county hospitals to re-engage physicians. As we have updates in any of these key areas, we'll be updating it on our website and our social media platforms.

Lastly, we're in this together. I'm interested in hearing your ideas for a better society. If there are any suggestions, please send them to our Executive Director, Theresa Barrett, PhD, CMP, CAE at tbarrett@montmedsoc.com.

Pyfer Fund Scholarship

The Pyfer Fund was established in 1915 under a Trust established by Howard F. Pyfer, MD. The Trust was established to help young physicians with continuing medical education costs. If you are a Montgomery County Medical Society member and are under the age of 45, you are eligible for reimbursement for your CME activities up to \$500.

[Click here](#) to learn more and apply. Reimbursement must be claimed before December 15, 2024, and must have occurred in the 2024 calendar year.

988 – The Lifeline!

Theresa J. Barrett, PhD, CMP, CAE

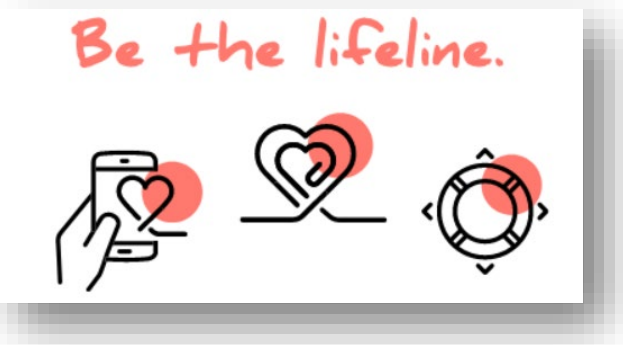
In July 2020, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) formally designated the 3-digit number 988 for mental health and suicide prevention services. On July 16, 2022, the 3-digit code, which was running through the National Suicide Prevention Line, transitioned to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or 988 Lifeline.* 988 services are funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health (Vibrant).

Since its inception, 988 counselors have fielded approximately 350,000 calls, chats, and texts per month. However, May 2023 saw that number jump to 402,000 equating to an increase in each contact method with calls up by 45%, answered chats by 52%, and answered texts by 938% over May 2022 statistics.¹

When people reach out to 988, whether by call, text, or chat, they are connected to trained counselors in the 988 Lifeline network which is made up of 200 local crisis centers. Counselors provide free and confidential crisis counseling and emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress and connect them to resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, nine months after its launch only 13% of U.S. adults had heard about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and knew what its purpose was.²

Standardized numbers such as 911 and 988 are only beneficial if the public knows about them. To increase knowledge about the existence of 988, SAMHSA has developed a [Partner Toolkit](#). The toolkit site provides key messages that cover the basics of 988 and provides a foundation for partners to build messages for their audience-specific needs; branded 988 materials like wallet cards, stickers, and magnets; social media shareables; fact sheets; and a host of other resources that can be used to help you raise awareness of this vital resource among your patients and your community.

At the state level, [Prevent Suicide PA](#), partially funded by the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), is focused on raising awareness regarding suicide and providing education and training to stakeholders across the Commonwealth. They work to reduce the stigma associated with suicide and strive to provide support to those affected by suicide, including attempted and loss survivors. Prevent Suicide PA is an active participant in the statewide Suicide Prevention Task Force.



Knowledge of programs such as 988 Lifeline and Prevent Suicide PA can save lives. Please take a few minutes to explore these valuable resources and share them within your community. You may be preventing a needless death because someone has information that they didn't have before.

* 1-800-273-8255 will always remain available to people in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.

References

1. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/performance-metrics>
2. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2023/05/23/most-us-adults-remain-unaware-of-988-suicide-and-crisis-lifeline>

Avoiding Cyber Attacks in Your Practice

The Office of Civil Rights reported that since 2009 more than 170 million health records have been exposed. Healthcare providers have reported breaches resulting from hacking, theft, instances of unauthorized access, and the improper disposal of patient information by a provider. Medical records are prime targets for cybercrimes as they can easily be sold to thieves who use the data to create fake identities. In addition, the information contained in the records also allows thieves to open credit cards and bank accounts and to take out loans in the name of the unsuspecting patient. Ransomware, where cybercriminals force healthcare providers to pay money to regain access to their encrypted data, is also on the rise.



Unfortunately, healthcare providers are easy targets, as many lack the resources to adopt and update policies and procedures and to engage IT experts to monitor and periodically update the security of their electronic systems. It is also important to note that the OCR has increased its audits of healthcare providers, which may be one reason for the increase in investigations of breaches.

As a result, it is critical that medical practices take the necessary steps to protect their patient data, including:

- Conduct an annual HIPAA Security Risk Assessment as required under HIPAA. This assessment involves not only a review of the electronic systems but also of the practice's administrative, physical, and technical safeguards.
- Install all the required updates to your software and operating system. Make sure you have trustworthy antivirus software in place and that it is up to date.
- Install an encryption program to protect your patient data.
- Review who in your organization has access to all patient records – not every employee needs to have unlimited access and access should be granted based upon the employee's job requirements.
- Business Associate Agreements must be executed and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that your business associates have procedures in place to protect your data.
- HIPAA requires that your staff receive training on an annual basis and allow for discussions of incidents that may have come up during the year involving the security of patient data.
- Many cyberattacks originate from staff opening emails or attachments containing a virus. All suspicious emails need to be reported to the privacy officer. Staff should not use practice computers for personal communication, to play games, or perform searches unrelated to the practice.
- Consider backing up your data off-site with a third-party vendor.
- Review the services provided by your IT vendor to ensure that it is providing all the services necessary to keep your patient data safe.

Dilworth Paxson has worked with many medical practices and other healthcare providers to ensure that they have taken the necessary steps to protect their data – from helping to perform risk assessments to training and guiding them through a breach incident. Any questions regarding the information contained in this article or if you need assistance with any aspect of HIPAA, including breaches, please contact Susan Orr, Esq., at Dilworth Paxson, LLP, by email (sorr@dilworthlaw.com) or phone (215-575-7033 or 484-678-5532).

Susan Orr is a health law attorney in the law firm of Dilworth, Paxson, LLP in Exton, PA.

In Case You Missed It...

News from the Pennsylvania Medical Society "The Dose"

2024 PAMED Innovation Grant Letters of Intent NOW OPEN!

Submit your Letters of Intent (LOIs) now for PAMED's 2024 Innovation Grant. This one-time health innovation grant funds projects that enough, facilitate, recognize and reward innovation and creative approaches to the field of medicine. PAMED

is looking for innovative projects with any or all of the following goals: Reduction of health care costs, Improvement in access to health care, and/or Improvement of quality of care. LOIs will be accepted until July 11, 2024! [Click here to apply.](#)

The Bureau of Professional & Occupational Affairs Announces New E-License!

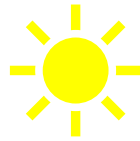
The Bureau of Professional & Occupational Affairs (Bureau) is excited to announce that as a licensee, you are now able to download and print your own license certificates! [READ MORE...](#)

2024 Medicare Provider Fee Schedule

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released the calendar year 2024 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) proposed rule. As PAMED continues to review the proposed rule, a more comprehensive interpretation for members will be provided. [READ MORE](#)

Health Tips from Pulse

As of June 20, 2024, Summer is officially here! As Montgomery County starts to bake and sizzle under the blazing sun in the first official heatwave of summer, it's time to remind our patients that it is essential to keep both humans and their furry friends cool and safe. Here are some quick and effective tips to share:



Mind Your Activity - Remind everyone to avoid strenuous activities during peak heat hours (10 AM - 4 PM). Early morning or late evening walks are ideal for both humans and pets. And don't forget hot asphalt can burn pet paws! A quick touch test with hands or feet can prevent a scorched tootsie.



Hydration is key - Humans and animals alike need to drink plenty of water. Encourage patients to stay hydrated and ensure pets have constant access to fresh, cool water. Dehydration can exacerbate heat-related illnesses such

as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. After all, no one wants to be a dehydrated hot mess!



Fashion Forward - Lightweight, loose-fitting, and light-colored clothing is the summer uniform. Wide-brimmed hats and umbrellas are not just for style—they provide much-needed shade. And please, never leave pets in parked cars. Even with cracked windows, cars can turn into ovens!



Know the Signs - Teach patients to recognize heat exhaustion (heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, nausea) and heat stroke (high body temp, confusion, no sweating, rapid pulse). Immediate medical attention is crucial for heat stroke. For pets, watch for panting, drooling, lethargy, vomiting, and collapse. Heat stress is no joke—get them to a vet ASAP if these signs appear.

Be Cool, literally - Advise patients to stay in air-conditioned spaces as much as possible. No AC? No problem! Suggest escaping to shopping malls, libraries, community centers, or take in the latest new release in theatres. Pets should chill in shaded areas outside and in cool, well-ventilated spaces indoors.



For more tips, check out the CDC's [Guidelines on Heat-Related Illness Prevention](#) and the [American Veterinary Medical Association's](#) advice on keeping pets cool. Stay chill out there!

Have something you would like to see or contribute to Pulse?
Send an email to Executive Director, Theresa Barrett, PhD, CMP, CAE at tbarrett@montmedsoc.com

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