

By Patrick Lapinski

CONVENIENT, COMPASSIONATE CARE



As the beginning of the year gets underway nearly every household will hang up new calendars, open new day planners and begin the process of filling in those special dates – birthdays, anniversaries, vacation days and on a more serious note, medical appointments.

Fortunately for Superior and Douglas County residents, St. Luke's Mariner Medical Clinic, backed by one of the most comprehensive hospital systems in the region, is a proven leader, providing discreet, professional and compassionate care services.

Centrally located at 109 North 28th Street in Superior, the single-story Mariner Medical Clinic offers a traditional menu of

family practice/primary care, ophthalmology, physical therapy, a full suite of digital imaging specialties, including 3D mammography available five-days a week, diagnostic laboratory services and an outpatient surgery center. Roughly three-fourths of the clinic's working space is occupied with exam rooms, medical offices and physical therapy space. The remaining space is dedicated to the clinic's outpatient surgery services.

"I think it's nice that we're right at home or right here in people's backyard," says clinic manager Susan Backlund. "People are always welcome to go to Duluth, but those people that don't like to cross the bridge, we try to have specialty services brought here for them."

Specialists from St. Luke's Hospital in Duluth, such as urologists, frequently rotate between any number of St. Luke's satellite facilities, including the Mariner Medical Clinic. "We try to do as much as we can to make their care more convenient for them."

In what we now consider the post-COVID period, Backlund wants residents to know that one of the services that has returned to the Mariner Medical Clinic is a popular program called Primary Care Plus, which handles same-day appointments and walk-in care for minor issues.

Backlund says it's important for community residents to know they can come in and be seen if they're not feeling well,



if they need a blood pressure check, their meds checked or even the last-minute sports physical.

"I think that's super important because a lot of people don't know that service was brought back to the Mariner Clinic. We are always evaluating what the community needs so that we can grow." Primary Care Plus is available for patients to 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

MARINER SURGICAL CENTER

On any given month, the Mariner Medical Clinic surgical staff of 11 assist in outpatient surgical procedures, says Jacque Volk, DNP, MSN, Director of Ambulatory Surgery for St. Luke's. "Most of the specialties take an hour or less. It's a quick turnaround," says Volk, who compares the experience to a hospital visit, except on a smaller scale.

The eight-room surgery center is laid out with the nurse's station in the middle and the patient rooms flanking the station for easy accessibility. In Superior, patients enjoy easy in-out access on a flat, level surface lot without having to navigate parking ramps.

"I would say monthly, we perform about 55 to 70 procedures on the high end," says Volk. "As a rule, we have standing providers here on Mondays and Wednesdays." Dr. Joshua Larson, MD, FACS (Fellow of

the American College of Surgeons) is our general surgeon; he also performs endoscopies several times a month, depending on the demand. An endoscopy is a procedure using a medical imaging device, an endoscope, to examine the interior of a hollow organ or cavity in the body. The procedure is commonly used to screen for symptoms of digestive cancer."

As a satellite clinic within the St. Luke's Hospital family, the surgical staff at Mariners Clinic have the full backing and support of the hospital system at their disposal.

"We have anesthesiologists pooled from the same group of anesthesiologists that work at the hospital who rotate through Mariner surgery center. So, you're getting the same care, whichever place you go," Volk explains.

"We have five full-time RNs that work here," she adds, "with a couple of casual RNs that are surgically trained who know all of the areas of surgery."

Casual RNs are akin to a utility player in baseball, someone who performs multiple roles, explains Volk. "They can be admitting you, they might discharge you, and they might be in the operating room with you, so they're very well rounded. And then we have two Surg Tech's (Surgical Technologist) that work there, and they are the ones that assist the procedures. You're



getting really the same standard of care that you'd get at the hospital, just at a smaller scale, more intimate, private rooms."

The private rooms are a unique feature of the Mariner Medical Clinic surgery center. "A lot of times the family member comes and hangs out with the patient," says Volk, which helps put the patient at ease. "We have doors on the rooms, whereas a lot of facilities just have curtains and a lot of exposure to other people, but here, it's extremely private. We allow them to be in there and they can shut the door when the patient goes off to surgery. You can't hear what other people are talking about, so it's really HIPAA compliant and very nice space."

The importance of having a facility like the Mariner Medical Clinic within a community is not lost on Volk, who grew up in a

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— CLINIC MANAGER SUSAN BACKLUND



PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. LUKE'S



small, rural town on the outskirts of Duluth. She understands the needs and desires of patients to seek care as close to home as possible, especially if they are using a medical transport and making multiple visits. "If you're seeing multiple providers," says Volk, "being able to stay close by and not having to find your way around a large facility or a large campus is extremely valuable."

"I think people within Superior really try to stay there," says Volk. "They'll ask, 'Can I be seen here? Is that specialist coming here? What can be done here?' I get a lot of feedback from endoscopy scheduling in Duluth where a patient may have been seen in Duluth by a provider, but when they go to schedule their procedure, they ask if they can be done at the Superior location."

Volk points out that even if patients don't have an established primary care with

St. Luke's they certainly can request to be seen by any of the surgeons that operate at Mariner surgical center. "Typically, their primary provider will send a referral to whatever doctor they want to see. Sometimes the insurance you have plays a factor and drives you to go in network or out of network if St. Luke's is out of your network, but typically, its primary care referrals. For instance, Dr. Yoon, the clinic's ophthalmologist, is very well known in the community, and frequently receives referral patients."

Dr. John Yoon, MD, a 1987 graduate of the University of Michigan Medical School, heads the Mariner Medical Clinic's eye care department. As a certified ophthalmologist with 36 years of experience in the field of eye care, Dr. Yoon is always in demand for treatment of serious eye conditions that require surgery, and is versatile

in procedures to treat cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, eyelid disorders and other macular-related symptoms.

No referrals are needed for a patient to schedule a comprehensive eye examination. The clinic's staff of optometrists are available to assist in a wide range of non-surgical services, from contact lens fittings to prescriptions for eye glasses or specialty lenses, as well as DOT eye evaluations and drivers eye examinations, not to mention any accidental injuries.

PHYSICAL THERAPY

Physical therapy is a mainstay of most medical clinics, and the PT staff at St. Luke's Mariner Medical Clinic provide therapeutic regimens for nearly all ages as an extension of the clinic's family practice.



"WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING AT THE LATEST RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE FOR WHAT WE COULD BE DOING WITH PATIENTS."

– PHYSICAL THERAPIST MARISSA LEVINE

Marissa Levine, PT, DPT, is one of three physical therapists who work at the Superior clinic, and one of 36 scattered throughout St. Luke's service area. A graduate of Superior Senior High School, Levine was interested in pursuing a career in sports medicine, and shadowed a physical therapist as part of the school's senior project, where students research potential careers, conduct informational interviews, and participate in a job shadowing with professionals in their field of interest.

For Levine, this led to enrollment in the physical therapy program at St. Scholastica, where she completed her undergraduate degree. She has since gone on to receive her doctorate in physical therapy, which in 1996 became a required industry standard for physical therapists. Levine said she never imagined she'd be working at a clinic two miles from her childhood home, but is absolutely thrilled with the opportunity to pursue her career in her home town.

The overarching goal of physical therapy is to relieve pain, increase mobility and strengthen weakened muscles. "Outpatient orthopedics is most of our population," says Levine, "but we see patients of all ages, from pediatrics all the way up to people in their 90s. Some people have had surgery, like a joint replacement or rotator cuff repair or an ACL repair."

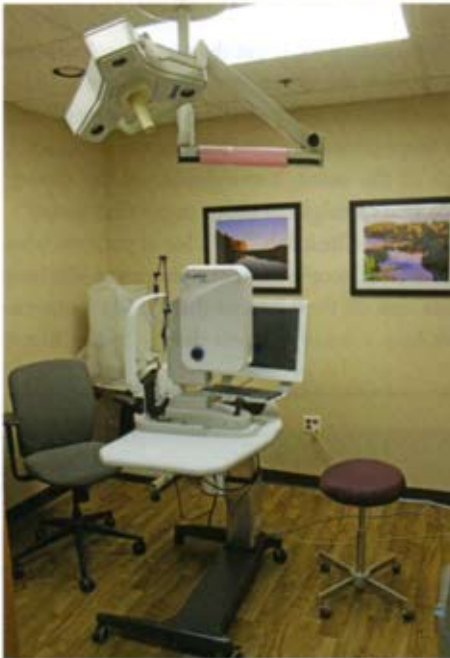
Levine says a majority of her patients have not had surgery and use physical therapy as a deterrent to a surgical intervention. "Physical therapy can be a great option."

Those before-surgery events range from simple ankle sprains to patients dealing with chronic symptoms like back, knee and shoulder pain, with the overall goal of avoiding surgery.

Unlike a primary care physician, Levine and her fellow physical therapists usually see their patients over extended periods of time, four to six weeks commonly, rather than for an hour or less with a primary care physician. "A unique part about my job that I like is that I'm scheduled for 45 minutes to an hour with each patient, so we have good time to build rapport, and really get a good plan going."

Some people might only need one time, and they're comfortable continuing on their own at home. "We can save somebody's exercises, and send them videos electronically via St. Luke's MedBridge patient portal." Levine says patients simply "log in and look at that on their phone or on their email. Most of our patients prefer to just have a paper copy right in front of them, but both options are available, and it's easy to look back. Previously, if they had therapy a year ago, I can pull up their exercise program and see what they were given at that time."







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– JACQUE VOLK, DNP, MSN, DIRECTOR OF AMBULATORY SURGERY FOR ST. LUKE'S.

If you are wondering how the Mariner Medical Clinic lab stacks up, this past August the laboratory earned the COLA Laboratory Excellence award. The Commission on Office Laboratory Accreditation (COLA) is a private, nonprofit accreditation organization that helps laboratories meet federal standards and regulatory requirements and is widely considered the most recognized laboratory accreditation body in the United States.

"It is a big deal," says Backlund. "Not many people get them, and we've never had one before," she says proudly. "A COLA inspector conducts on-site inspections, and you have to meet all the accreditation and be valid for two years," says Backlund. "You have to meet all their inspections, which includes the chemistry, biochemistry. You have to go through all the urine, hemoglobin, all the blood; everything has to be kosher for the two years straight in order to get that award."

Backlund notes that the Mariner Medical Clinic lab "has a lot of patients who drive to Duluth to see their providers, as well as people from outlying areas like Iron River and Solon Springs that come here and do their labs or their INRs (international normalised ratio blood test). We have a lot of patients that go to the Mayo






Clinic for specialty services, but then they'll come here to do their blood work. People that have transplants will come here and do their labs. So, our lab gets used for a lot of different services," explains Backlund. "Our staff works really hard!"

The diagnostic lab also performs drug screening and alcohol testing for local businesses in addition to serving medical patients.

The Mariner Medical Clinic staff look forward to seeing you on your next visit.

"It's nice that the primary care is open again, patients value that, and, they don't have to drive over the bridge!" laughs Backlund. "People are always welcome to go to Duluth and use the Duluth St. Luke's, but we're trying to make it convenient for people by trying to have specialty services brought here for them and make their care more convenient." 

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.