

# M.D. NEWS

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR PHYSICIANS



## Signature Medical Group

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Medicine's Future

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## Newly Formed Group Ideally Poised to Lead Southeastern Massachusetts into Medicine's Future

By Christopher Iliades

When the Signature Healthcare network was formed in February of 2008, the aim was to provide an integrated healthcare delivery system for Southeastern Massachusetts.

This fall, the latest phase in reaching that goal comes into focus with the formation of Signature Medical Group (SMG), created by merging four previously separate medical groups, Bridgewater Goddard Park Medical Associates, Women's Health Affiliates, Primary Care Affiliates, and the Brockton Hospital Specialty Physicians Group.

Signature Healthcare serves 20 southeastern Massachusetts communities surrounding its flagship facility, Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital. The 253-bed private, not-for-profit teaching hospital offers centers of excellence in Cardiology, Emergency Medicine, Maternity Care, Pediatrics, and Cancer treatment. The Signature organization is dedicated to providing high quality care through clinical excellence, advanced technology, and an innovative, community based approach to wellness.

"Signature Medical Group will employ 200 providers, and will have

its own physician-led board to guide its policies," explains David Drinkwater, M.D., Chief of Surgery and President of Signature Medical Group. "The new medical group, along with Brockton Hospital, under the parent group Signature Healthcare, will provide an integrated health care delivery system that coordinates local outpatient and inpatient care to improve quality and continuity of patient service."

The new group will have approximately 50 primary care physicians, 50 specialty care physicians, and 50 hospital-based physicians. There are also 50 nurse practitioner and physician assistant midlevel care providers.

From 15 physician offices located in Brockton, Abington, Randolph, Bridgewater, Raynham, Stoughton, and West Bridgewater, and an Urgent Care Center located at 110 Liberty Street in Brockton, the group will strive to offer its 100,000 patients same day service, expanded access to urgent care, and quick access to specialty care.

### Continuity and Change

Some of the SMG Board members working at 110 Liberty St. include (from l-to-r): Robert Greenberg, M.D.; Mike Dern, M.D.; Robert Weinstein, M.D.; Greg Seiler, M.D.; Vicki Schwartz, M.D.

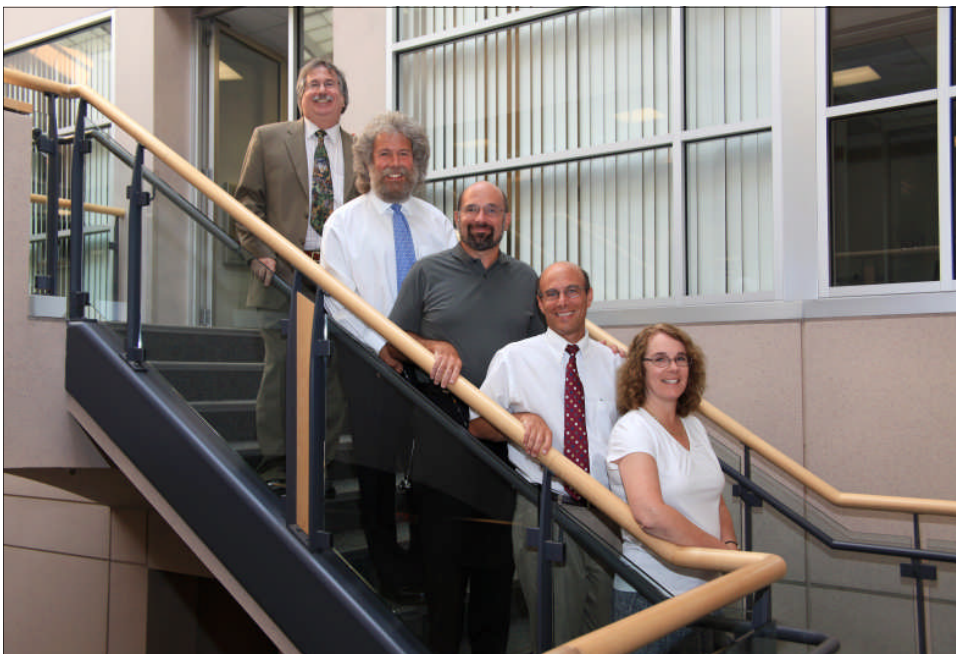


PHOTO BY MICHAEL SELLSTONE

The formation of SMG capitalizes on the long history of the individual physician practices from which it is comprised. By bringing together specialties and resources in one cohesive group to work together for patient care, each of the previously independent groups is strengthened and enhanced.

Signature Healthcare Women's Health Affiliates, for instance, has offered a full range of services including well-woman gynecologic care and prenatal and obstetric care for many years. Signature's Primary Care Affiliates has long provided adult primary care and urgent care. The Brockton Hospital Specialty Physicians Group includes well-known specialists in Cardiology, Surgery, Orthopedics, and Endocrinology. And Bridgewater Goddard Park Medical Associates is one of the largest multi-specialty physician

groups in southeastern Massachusetts, and has provided primary, specialty, urgent, and diagnostic care to patients of all ages for the past 40 years.

Although the names of the physician groups will change, continuity of care for Signature's current patients is assured. The practice locations, staff, providers, and phone numbers will remain the same.

“A lot of the changes have already taken place in preparation for the new organizational structure,” explains Dr. Drinkwater. “Systems have been enhanced to make communications more streamlined and user friendly. We want our patients to feel that they are being supported appropriately.”

“The changes that we do hope our patients will notice will be in the areas of convenience, improved communication, and increased connectivity. We are very patient focused from top to bottom on every interaction and at every site.”

And the new group is hiring new physicians to enhance its patient service.

“We have added more than 20 physicians in either primary or specialty care in the past year,” says Deb Wilson, Senior Vice President of Ambulatory Services and Physician Network.

“We’ve staffed our sites and our state-of-the-art Urgent Care Center to provide our patients with excellent access to care.”

Urgent care services, including full-scale laboratory and radiology services, are provided at 110 Liberty Street in Brockton on evenings, weekends and holidays. This means patients do not have to rely on the hospital's emergency room for minor ailments.

“We are trying to offer care that is more in line with our patients’ lifestyles. If you work in Boston, and you get home at 7pm, you can still be seen. We have the ability to offer you the right care, in the right place, and at the right time,” says Dr. Drinkwater. “In the Signature system, ER visits should be for emergencies.”



SMG physicians are located in seven communities around Southeastern Massachusetts.

## Electronic Health Records

One of the stated goals of healthcare reform is a uniform embrace of electronic patient health records. Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital is one of only 1.5 percent of American hospitals already achieving that goal.

The journey began in 2007 when Signature was one of three hospital health systems that participated in the Massachusetts e-Health Collaborative. Signature invested five million dollars of its own funds in the new technology. The three year, community-based pilot program

## Members of the Board of Signature Medical Group

- Dr. David Drinkwater, President
- Dr. Valentin Atanassov
- Dr. Robert Covett
- Dr. Michael Dern
- Dr. Jean-Pierre Geagea
- Dr. Kerry Girard
- Dr. Robert Greenberg
- Dr. Marc Greenwald
- Dr. Abdel-hai Hammo
- Dr. Kenneth Lawson
- Dr. David Leiman
- Dr. Keith Merlin
- Dr. Paul Pettinato
- Dr. Vicki Schwartz
- Dr. Gregory Seiler
- Dr. Mitchell Selinger
- Dr. Craig Warnick
- Dr. Tutasi Waters
- Dr. Robert Weinstein
- Eugene Wallace, Treasurer
- Deb Wilson, Clerk

has put Signature Healthcare at the leading edge of information technology.

“The journey is not yet complete, but it is far along,” says Interim CEO Eugene Wallace. “We will gradually become paperless and patients will be able to contact their physician through a secure website and have access to appropriate medical records. Just like you have online banking, you will one day soon have online healthcare.”

Today, Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital and its physician practice sites are all connected to the electronic health records of Signature's patient population.

“The emergency room physician at the hospital is linked to the doctor's office and to the hospital laboratory and radiology records,” says Wallace. “The emergency room physician can see what recent tests a patient has had and avoid unnecessary repeats.”

Using computers on wheels or tablet PCs, inpatient and outpatient providers can now provide coordinated care. “The old model of the patient picking up their X-rays at the hospital and taking them from office to office is no longer acceptable,” asserts Dr. Drinkwater. “I can sit at my patient's bedside and go over their actual CT scan with them on my PC.”

“The primary care doctor in the outpatient office is linked to the inpatient emergency room doctor, and the surgeon is able to read the primary care doctor's most recent office notes. That is what we mean by efficiency of care,” he points out.

And the new system is not only of benefit to physicians in the hospital setting. It has the potential to fundamentally alter the very nature of the physician-patient relationship.

“Signature Healthcare is reviewing the functionality of the system we have in place to allow patients to contact their doctor through a secure patient portal,” notes Dr. Drinkwater. “Instead of calling the office, patients will be able to interact with their doctor, see their lab work,

and even schedule their own appointments.”

Dr. Drinkwater expects the website to be educational as well as interactive so that a patient can find information about their diagnosis and get links to other informative health websites.

## Positioned for the Future

Electronic health records, accessibility to care, and coordination of treatment are key components that Signature Healthcare has put in place to be successful now and in the future. Being ahead of the national curve on electronic health records puts them in position to receive federal funding reimbursement through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, which includes \$34 billion in Medicare and Medicaid incentive bonus payments for eligible providers who can demonstrate ‘meaningful use’ of electronic health records.

“Electronic health record technology will give us the tools to enhance quality, cost efficiency and transparency,” says Wilson. “Having these systems in place is going to be essential in the new healthcare environment.”

“Nobody knows exactly what the new healthcare reform will look like,” adds Dr. Drinkwater. “But we do know that the current rate of healthcare cost acceleration is not sustainable. We know that cost control is coming and the healthcare systems that will be rewarded are those that provide the best quality and accountability.”

And the extensive use of electronic health records can also lead to better care through a more preventive approach to medicine.

“The collected data from electronic health records can allow more individualized care,” says Wallace. “For example, we can look at how many of our patients over a certain age have not yet had a colonoscopy

and get them in for this important preventive screening exam. Imagine the difficulty of doing that with paper records.”

“The future of healthcare may well present us with some form of global episodic reimbursement in place of the fee-for-service system we have now. This will mean that healthcare providers will share a predetermined flat rate for a condition such as appendicitis. Managing a case of appendicitis effectively brings a favorable patient outcome as well as favorable and fair reimbursement for providers. By integrating care, sharing information and working together we can better treat for the patient – achieving better outcomes with less wasted time and effort.

Better outcomes help us control costs while providing the quality care our patients expect and deserve,” Wallace concludes. “We feel that our integrated system of care will position us well for whatever healthcare reform is coming.”

*For more information about Signature Medical Group, please call (866) 974-7979 or visit [www.signature-healthcare.org](http://www.signature-healthcare.org)*

**The 21-member SMG board includes chiefs of service and representatives of the founding medical practices. Pictured are (from l-to-r): David Drinkwater, M.D.; Craig Warnick, M.D.; David Leiman, M.D.; Tutasu Waters, M.D.; Abdel-hai Hammo, M.D.; Marc Greenwald, M.D.; Paul Pettinato, M.D.; Kerry Girard, M.D.; Ken Lawson, M.D.; Mitchell Selinger, M.D.; Keith Merlin, M.D.; Jean-Pierre Geagea, M.D.**

