

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Fills a Prescription for Good Food for UVA Kidney Center Patients

VERONA, Va.—November 9, 2020— A dose of hope in the form of nourishing food is what patients receive through the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank’s Food Pharmacy. This past spring, the University of Virginia Kidney Center in Charlottesville became the first Blue Ridge Area Food Bank partner site to distribute medically-tailored food bags to patients who are food insecure. Despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has provided approximately 400 bags of food since March.



“The Food Pharmacy program began with 14 patients in early March and [has] continued through the pandemic,” said Maria Bowman, programs manager at the Food Bank. “Currently, the program is open to all Kidney Center patients who self-identify as food-insecure.”

Bowman worked with the Kidney Center’s Registered Dietitian Elaine McCall to plan how the program would meet the dietary needs of patients in renal failure. [Research](#) shows food insecurity is associated with end stage renal disease when diabetes or hypertension is also present. According to McCall, both poor health and low income often are barriers to dialysis patients receiving the nutrient-dense foods they need. She says most dialysis patients must stop working to receive treatment, and the disability benefits are often not enough to cover the budget.



Elaine McCall, RD

“Typically, our patients need more than just dialysis, so they are going to multiple appointments each week, which takes up lots of time and money,” said McCall. “It’s really quite expensive, even if it’s just small costs along the way. We have patients who must choose between medications and food, sadly.

“I wish it [weren’t] that way,” McCall added.

Thanks to the Food Pharmacy, her patients no longer need to make this sacrifice. Each week, patients go home with one 20 lb. bag full of food that is suited to their dietary needs. Over the last eight months, patients have responded favorably to the food they receive. Favorite items include:

- Cereal
- Spaghetti
- Green Beans
- Rice
- Peaches
- Milk
- Apples
- Canned tuna
- Canned chicken

Lee B. has been on dialysis for about 4 years and is waiting for a kidney transplant match. He receives treatments 3 days per week, which leaves him tired. But he's enthusiastic about the food he receives.

"I like the tuna fish and peaches," he said. "All that [food] is good," Lee added.

[Dr. Emaad M. Abdel-Rahman](#), nephrologist and director of the UVA Kidney Center, says diet is crucial when it comes to chronic kidney disease—whether the focus is prevention or disease management. Rahman explains that dialysis treatment removes waste from the blood stream—but also filters potassium, phosphorus, and protein. To maintain appropriate levels of these nutrients and minerals, patients with chronic kidney disease are asked to follow carefully calibrated diet recommendations.



Emaad M. Abdel Rahman, MD

"Good food choices can have a huge impact on the incidence and prevalence of chronic kidney disease," said Dr. Rahman. "When they [already have] kidney disease and they're progressing, the role of diet becomes even more important when we speak about potassium, phosphorous and protein. So, it becomes more involved rather than earlier on. Regardless of the stage, diet plays a huge role."

Currently, the Food Bank's Food Pharmacy at UVA's Kidney Center helps replenish those nutrients and minerals by distributing shelf-stable foods with select, fresh produce. The long-term vision for the partnership includes:

- Adapting the [Kidney Disease Quality of Life \(KDQOL\)](#) tool to measure outcome data and assess program impact.
- Expanding the program to more UVA Kidney Center clinics, possibly starting in their rural locations, which overlap with the Food Bank's service area.
- Exploring ways to extend the program to different UVA clinics and reach more patients.

"The Kidney Center team saw that their patients experience barriers to accessing adequate nutrition and wanted to find an innovative solution. This holistic, dignified approach to patient wellness is both inspiring and impactful," Bowman added. "We're grateful for each one of them and excited to continue our work to provide nutritious food to patients who need it."

"We value the partnership. I really would like that to continue, and I really want to see the impact," said Rahman. "The patients are appreciative, and they like it. So, I think we (have) already succeeded."

This program launched with support from Sentara Healthcare. For more information, contact Abena Foreman-Trice at aforemantrice@brafb.org or 540-280-6588. For [images](#) and videos associated with this story, including patient soundbites, please visit the media resources page for reporters and content creators here: www.brafb.org/media-resources/newsroom/.

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About the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

Founded in 1981, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is the largest organization alleviating hunger in western and central Virginia. Headquartered in Verona, the Food Bank serves 25 counties and eight cities through distribution centers in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Verona, and Winchester. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank distributes nearly 28 million pounds of food annually to 115,390 people each month through a network of 203 community partners— food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, churches, and other non-profit groups— and 180 program sites serving children, seniors, and families. The Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, a national food bank association that supports 200 food banks across the United States. For more information, visit www.brafb.org.