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New Selma Heart Center opens with a focus on 'Better Care'

By LISA PETERSON Special to The Winchester Star
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Dr. Rakesh Saraiya is leading the Selma Heart Center in Winchester.

Provided photo

In a major expansion of local specialized healthcare services, Selma Medical Associates has officially launched the Selma Heart Center. Operating out of Selma Medical's building at 104 Selma Drive in Winchester, the new cardiology group aims to combine top-tier clinical expertise with a highly personalized approach to cardiovascular medicine.

Led by medical director Dr. Rakesh Saraiya, the Selma Heart Center marks a new chapter in the practice's long-standing history of cardiac care in the Shenandoah Valley. The center introduces an integrated framework designed to guide patients through everything from early preventive screenings to complex, long-term disease management.

Saraiya said the center was born out of a desire to streamline specialized cardiac care under a unified, patient-centric philosophy they call "Better Care." The inspiration to rebuild a dedicated, private cardiology group at Selma stems from a regional deficit in medical availability.

"Before I moved to Winchester, I called the hospital there and said, 'I'm having some heart palpitations. When can I see a cardiologist?' and they said, 'Six months,'" Saraiya recalled. "I realized we need availability. If there's a six-month wait, there are patients that need care."

According to Saraiya, while there is one medical doctor for every 877 people in Fairfax County, Frederick County has just one doctor for every 1,800 to 1,900 people — a ratio he said is "way below the national average."

Saraiya accepted the leadership position to revitalize a cardiology presence that had shrunk over the past decade.

"We're growing for all the right reasons," Saraiya said. "We want life expectancy in Frederick County to increase."

The multi-disciplinary team assembled at the center features specialized providers, including board-certified cardiologists Dr. Robert Townsend Cole, Dr. Zachary Hollis, and Dr. Swetha Alluri, alongside Physician Assistants Elizabeth Robinson and Lawrence Wolfgang.

Longtime Selma physician Dr. Philip O'Donnell noted that the launch marks an exciting new milestone for the practice. On the center's website, he said, "The Selma Heart Center marks a new chapter — one that builds on our legacy while advancing the way we care for patients through innovation, expertise, and a deep commitment to compassionate, high-quality care for our patients and their families."

To support the team's clinical goals, the facility recently expanded its imaging suite to offer comprehensive nuclear cardiac studies alongside standard electrocardiograms (EKGs), echocardiograms, and stress testing.

"We have the legal credentials required to perform Nuclear Cardiology Procedures such as Nuclear Stress tests," Saraiya noted. "The wait to get the test done at other locations is two months. Two months is not good if the patient is trying to get a procedure or they're having active chest pain."

Effective Aug. 15, the practice will resume performing stress echoes, carotid artery scans, and treating aortoiliac disease, alongside launching a venous ablation program for patients with varicose veins.

The center also has several highly targeted sub-specialty programs. Among them is an Interdisciplinary A-Fib Clinic focused on arrhythmia management, pacemaker and defibrillator care, and a specialized focus on women's heart health designed to address the unique cardiovascular presentation and risks specific to women.

A standout feature of the new center is its Advanced Heart Failure Clinic, which operates in a strategic clinical partnership with Inova Health. This collaboration allows local patients who have received heart transplants or Left Ventricular Assist Devices (LVADs) to receive specialized, highly technical follow-up care in Winchester, saving them frequent trips to Northern Virginia. "High-risk heart failure patients can get elite-tier monitoring right in their neighborhood," said Dr. Saraiya.

Beyond the technology and clinical partnerships, the Selma Heart Center is emphasizing a return to close-knit, collaborative medicine.

"Keeping local primary care providers in the loop is a top priority, so that a patient's entire medical team remains informed from the initial diagnostic referral through long-term recovery," said Dr. Saraiya.

Local primary care providers are already welcoming the addition to the region's healthcare landscape.

"It's really great to have another option for access to specialty care in the Shenandoah Valley," said Dr. Emily Chan, a Winchester-area primary care physician. "With being in primary care, access to specialists is always a problem, so I welcome Selma Heart Center to our community."

Operating under an independent, private practice model allows the team to bypass corporate gridlock and focus squarely on the patient experience.

"My job is to take care of patients, and I don't have to worry about what administration tells me to do because at the end of the day, we're a private practice," Saraiya said. "All we have to do is have a meeting, and two days later, the plan is executed. Compared to the other behemoth model where you basically have a meeting about a meeting about a meeting. A lot of things get said, but not a lot gets done."

He notes that this patient-first mindset is the core of their "Better Care" philosophy.

"Better care basically means timely care," Saraiya explained. "Our goal is to treat everyone with care, love, and respect, much like I would want for my own family members. Unfortunately, with institutionalized medicine, they just want to churn out numbers. For us, it's not about production. It's about quality of care."

To achieve this, the center has launched an AI-assisted cloud-based scheduling system allowing patients to self-schedule. The software automatically screens symptom entries, flagging high-acuity cases so urgent patients bypass traditional wait times.

Ensuring that this model stays accessible to everyone in the community is a major pillar of the group's practice.

"We need to be more available, affable, and affordable, and that's basically our motto," Saraiya said. "If our patients don't have insurance, or their premiums are too high, we offer flexible financial options, and we also have a debt payment plan. It's our way of giving back."

Following a soft launch on July 1, minor construction delays mean the center will be completely built out and fully operational in about six weeks, though patient care and advanced diagnostic test scheduling are already underway.

When patients complete their care at Selma Heart Center, the ultimate goal is simple peace of mind, according to Saraiya.

"I want them to have confidence in their doctor and feel that they have someone who is on their side," he said. "And I want them to know that we're their partner in their cardiac care and have a team behind them. That's our objective."

The center is currently accepting new patients and is processing referrals for individuals experiencing symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, or those requiring comprehensive cardiovascular risk evaluations. For more information, visit selmamed.com/selmaheart or contact the center directly at 540-678-2847.

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