New immunotherapy options for grass and ragweed allergy patients

Allergy shots have been available at Gundersen Health System for decades. While they remain the gold standard for immunotherapy treatment, some patients do not tolerate allergy shots well or cannot get to the clinic for weekly appointments.

Gundersen offers a new, convenient alternative called sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) for patients suffering from grass and/or ragweed allergies. SLIT is a once-a-day tablet that dissolves very quickly under the tongue, and treats the root cause of allergies like subcutaneous immunotherapy does.

Todd Mahr, MD
Gundersen Pediatric Specialties

Gundersen board-certified pediatric allergist Todd Mahr, MD, says SLIT is a great option for someone who is taking medication and not feeling symptom relief, or has declined allergy shots.

“Although your patients are not experiencing any grass or ragweed symptoms now, it’s important to start the conversation now. SLIT should be taken 12 weeks before the start of grass allergy season (typically at its peak in May-June so grass therapy should start now through early February), and 12 weeks before the start of ragweed allergy season (typically at its peak in August-September so start ragweed therapy in May), and continue to be taken throughout the season,” advises Dr. Mahr. “This gives the body time to become less sensitive in preparation for the allergy season.”

Geriatric Assessment Clinic collaborates with you on care

Mary Bassing, MD, is providing collaborative, extensive evaluations at Gundersen Health System’s newly created Geriatric Assessment Clinic. This clinic augments the expert care already provided by you, or our Internal Medicine colleagues, to your older adult patients.

Dr. Bassing, a geriatrician, is fellowship-trained in geriatric medicine at University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics. For the Geriatric Assessment Clinic, Dr. Bassing is joined by a Gundersen pharmacist and a social worker.

The overall goal of the clinic is assisting you in optimizing patient quality of life and facilitating maintenance of independence while planning for the future.
Regional Services: Your frontline staff at Gundersen

For 25 years, the staff of Gundersen’s Regional Services has been serving medical professionals throughout the Tri-County Region.

“We’ve taken the time to build relationships with regional providers, to get to know the environment in which they work and the resources they have available,” explains Dave Guggenbuehl, RN, MBA, director of Regional Services. “This helps us to know how we can help providers deliver the best care to patients.”

Regional Services staff

In addition to Dave, staff includes referral services representatives Kim Hable, RN; Rosie Nelson, RN; and Bob Patros, RN, as well as senior office assistants Debbie Seidel and Jini Stoeckly.

One of the key advantages you have in working with Dave, Kim, Rosie and Bob, is they all have strong clinical backgrounds. “We understand the needs and challenges faced by providers in rural practices, we can act as liaisons with specialists at Gundersen, and we’re in a better position to serve as a resource and advocate for you and your practice,” Dave says.

Regional Services team members bring their experiences and passions to the job. For example, Kim and Rosie work with emergency departments at rural hospitals and are well suited to this responsibility. Rosie worked for more than 30 years in Gundersen’s Trauma & Emergency Center (now Emergency Services) and Kim was a MedLink AIR emergency flight nurse for 15 years.

Meeting the needs of our rural healthcare partners

Thanks in part to Kim and Rosie’s efforts, Gundersen, in cooperation with regional partners, is launching a telestroke service. “Using telemedicine technology, we’ll be able to offer real-time neurological support for acute stroke care. And in answer to another vital need, we are able to offer real-time neurological support for acute stroke care. And in answer to another vital need, we are developing pediatric critical care and neonatal telemedicine programs for rural hospitals.”

Based on years’ experience and interactions with rural providers, Regional Services also:
- Coordinates medical education programs presented by Gundersen specialists to medical professionals in the region
- Works with rural clinics, hospitals and emergency rooms to develop effective evidence-based medical protocols
- Offers orientation programs for new providers in the region to introduce them to Gundersen’s specialty services and technology
- Helps establish successful outreach and telemedicine programs giving your patients at rural clinics and hospitals easier access to Gundersen specialists
- Was among the first in the Tri-state Region to start life-saving programs in partnership with regional hospitals such as Priority One Heart Attack and Stat TIA
- Helped developed MedLink—one number that connects you quickly with Gundersen for consultations or patient referrals

If there is anything that Dave or any of the Regional Services team can help you with, contact Regional Services via MedLink at (800) 336-5465 or in La Crosse call 775-5465.

Medical Education

Primary Care Winter Refresher
Feb. 26 & 27, 2015, at the Lunda Center -Western Technical College Campus – La Crosse
More at gundersenhealth.org/seminars

New Practices

- Kimberly Breidenbach, MD
  Family Medicine
  Location: Gundersen Tri-County Hospital and Clinics
  MD: University of Wisconsin – Madison
  Residency: University of Colorado – Aurora

- Robert Holness, MD
  Obstetrics and Gynecology
  Location: Gundersen Tomah Clinic
  MD: University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica
  Residency: Montefiore School of Medicine, Atlanta, Ga

- Benjamin Parsons, DO
  Hematology/ Medical Oncology
  Location: Gundersen La Crosse Clinic
  DO: Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine, Downers Grove, Ill
  Residency: Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Ill
  Fellowship: Loyola University - Chicago, Maywood, Ill

- Carl Draga, DDS
  Dental – Prosthodontics
  Location: Gundersen La Crosse Clinic
  DDS: Ohio State University, Columbus
  Prosthodontics: UT Health Science Center Prosthodontics Program, San Antonio, Texas

- Megan McClung, DO
  Family Medicine
  Location: Gundersen Tri-County Hospital and Clinics
  DO: Des Moines University
  Residency: Broadlawns Medical Center, Des Moines, Iowa

The intended patient population is older adults who may be at risk of losing independence because of complicated health status and functional and/or cognitive impairments. As you know, these patients often present with multi-morbidity, multiple medications and complicated social situations.

Appointments are typically 100 to 120 minutes long. Each member of the team brings a unique perspective and skill set to the patient. This allows for assessment of multiple domains of health and functioning (cognitive, psychological, physical, social and financial).

As a primary care provider, you may also have specific concerns such as:
- Ability to complete instrumental activities of daily living (including driving)
- Ability to continue living independently
- Capacity for self-care
- Decision-making capacity
- Medication review, potential influence of medications on cognition and functioning
- Declining mobility and risk of falls
- Behavioral and psychological symptoms related to known dementia

“We wish to collaborate with you to help problem-solve for complicated patients and save you time,” says Dr. Bassing.

To consult with Dr. Bassing, call her via MedLink at (800) 336-5465; in La Crosse at 775-5465.
New Outreach and Telemedicine Services

To schedule an outreach or telemedicine appointment for your patient, call MedLink at (800) 336-5465 or in La Crosse call 775-5465.

Regional Specialty Services (Outreach)

Medical Oncology/ Hematology
Provider: Alice Jaworski, MD
Location: Palmer Lutheran Health Care, West Union, Iowa

Obstetrics and Gynecology
Provider: Robert Holness, MD
Location: Gundersen Sparta Clinic, Sparta, Wis.

Pulmonary Sleep Study
Provider: Erica Neumeister, RN, NP
Location: Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital and Clinics, Hillboro, Wis.

Vascular Surgery
Provider: Kevin Schoeppel, MD
Location: Gundersen Prairie du Chien and Tomah Clinics, Wis.

Teledicine

Behavioral Health
Provider: Monica Hofmann, NP
Location: Gundersen Behavioral Health, Tomah, Wis.

Behavioral Health
Provider: Anne Gisvold, NP
Location: Gundersen St. Joseph’s Hospital and Clinics - Hillboro, Wis.

Hematology
Provider: Janet Torkelson, PA
Location: Palmer Lutheran Health Center, West Union, Iowa

Vascular Surgery
Provider: Kevin Schoeppel, MD
Location: Gundersen Prairie du Chien and Tomah Clinics, Wis.

Gundersen reaches energy independence milestone

Gundersen Health System has accomplished something no one else in healthcare has done—produced more energy than it used. Gundersen’s first day of energy independence was Oct. 14, 2014, and the organization is continuing to work on turning those days into months and years.

The goal was achieved through a combination of efficiency and clean energy projects. Gundersen is saving nearly $2 million annually through a 40 percent energy efficiency improvement. We have also implemented a biomass boiler and a geothermal project on our La Crosse campus and have joined with regional partners to create dairy digesters, wind turbines and a landfill gas-to-energy initiative.

Gundersen is now sharing what we’ve learned with other organizations. For more information go to gundersenenvision.org.

Study sheds new light on cholesterol-lowering drugs

Ezetimibe/simvastatin (brand name Vytorin) is a drug combination used for the treatment of dyslipidemia. The non-statin ezetimibe prevents LDL cholesterol from being absorbed in the gut. Simvastatin is a statin that inhibits an enzyme necessary for the body to make cholesterol.

There has been some controversy around the effectiveness of ezetimibe. Although it was shown to decreases cholesterol levels, it was believed that the combination of simvastatin and ezetimibe was not any better than simvastatin alone. This was the finding in a small 2006 study, but this study did not look at the long-term effects on heart attacks and strokes.

The recent findings from a large six-year study are challenging that belief. The new study showed that ezetimibe may, in fact, protect patients from cardiac problems including heart attacks and strokes.

New immunotherapy options for grass and ragweed allergy patients – continued from front page

While some allergy treatment centers have offered SLIT for many years, the medication and method have been used “off-label” and were not regulated or approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

“Sublingual immunotherapy for grass and ragweed pollens are the only types approved by the FDA,” notes Dr. Mahr. “When I prescribe something to my patients, I want to know if it’s going to benefit them and be safe. FDA approval ensures safety and effectiveness,” he explains.

Grass sublingual immunotherapy is approved for adults and children as young as 5 years of age. Ragweed sublingual immunotherapy is approved for adults ages 18 to 65. The first dose is administered at the doctor’s office and, if well tolerated, can be taken at home daily.

“I am pleased that at Gundersen, we now offer a complete menu of options for allergic disease, from immunomodulatory therapy when indicated,” adds Dr. Mahr.

To refer a patient or to learn more about SLIT, contact Gundersen Allergy and Immunology via MedLink at (800) 336-5465. In La Crosse call (608) 775-5465.

Clinical trials expand treatment options at Gundersen

While sublingual immunotherapy is only FDA approved for grass pollen and ragweed allergies at this time, clinical research trials are being conducted across the country.

One of those studies is in progress at Gundersen Health System and is testing the efficacy and safety of the sublingual immunotherapy tablet for house dust mites Gundersen patients and principal investigator Dr. Mahr are helping advance these cutting-edge treatments. Learn more at gundersenhealth.org/research.