



Metro photo

Aaron Salinas honored for drive to help in community

National association celebrates RGV medical professional

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

As a teenager, Aaron Salinas wanted nothing to do with health care. He laughs when he thinks of what his teenage self might think of his career today.

Throughout his South Texas community, Salinas cares for the most vulnerable patients in pediatric and general urgent care, student care and outreach. He is the BSN coordinator at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Nursing and a nurse practitioner at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Student Health Center and Brownsville Kiddie Health Center in Brownsville.

"It's the best job in the world," he said.

But Salinas didn't always feel this way. When Salinas was 13, his father died, leaving Salinas to connect this loss with the medical professionals who couldn't save his dad. The last thing he thought he would be doing today, he said, would be working as a nurse.

After high school, Salinas trained to be an emergency medical technician. It was this early experience, he said, that set him on his current path.

Salinas works in the community where he was born, where health and education resources are often limited. He's driven to deliver and advocate for

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Courtesy photo

AARON SALINAS, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, PMHNP-BC, NRP

Myasthenia Gravis

What you need to know about the autoimmune disease

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

You might have read about Ramsey Muniz in Monday's edition of The Monitor, remembering the La Raza Party champion who died recently from complications of Myasthenia Gravis.

You might have seen the television advertisement for a medication specifically developed for treating Myasthenia Gravis.

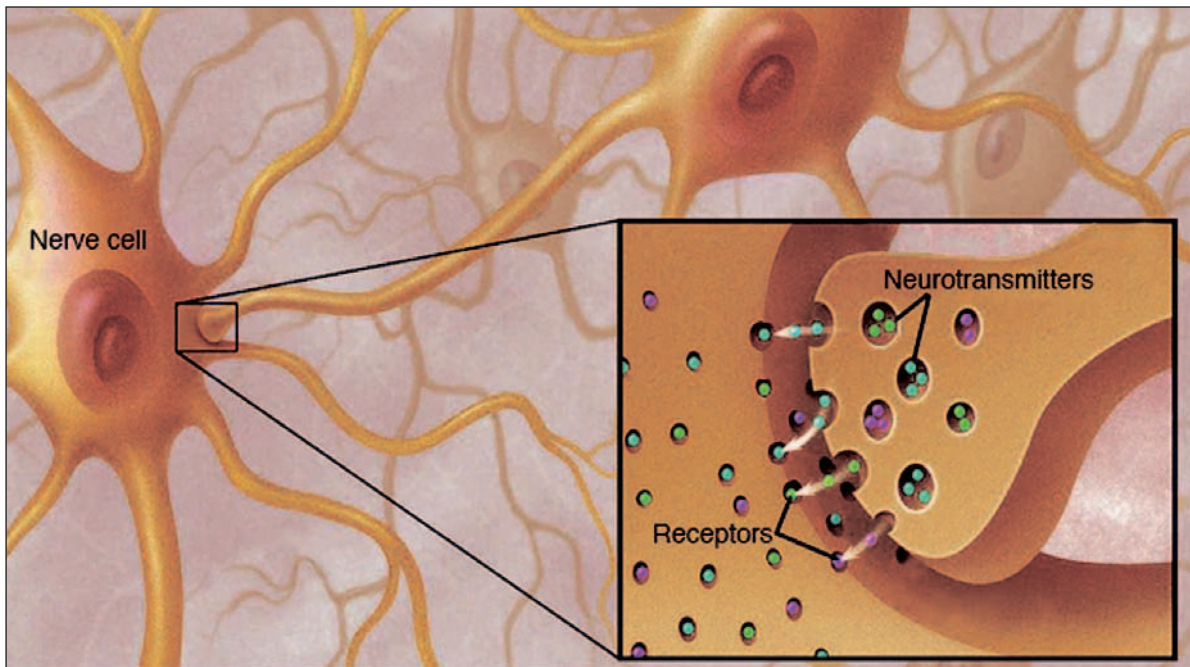
Beyond this, mention of the disease is minimal. Many have not heard of MG, or known the symptoms.

Myasthenia Gravis has a prevalence of 20 per 100,000 population in the United States, according to the National Library of Medicine government website.

According to Yale Medicine, the condition affects between 14 to 40 Americans per 100,000, and the potential number of Rio Grande Valley residents with MG is 200 to 550 persons.

WHAT IS MYASTHENIA GRAVIS (MG)?

Myasthenia Gravis is a chronic autoimmune, neuromuscular disease. Myasthenia Gravis (pronounced my-us-THEE-nee-uh GRAY-vis) is characterized by weakness and rapid fatigue mostly of any of the skeletal



Mayo Clinic

Chemicals messengers, called neurotransmitters, fit precisely into receptor sites on your muscle cells. In myasthenia gravis, certain receptor sites are blocked or destroyed, causing muscle weakness.

muscles that worsens after periods of activity and improves after periods of rest. These muscles are responsible for functions involving breathing and moving parts of the body, including the arms and legs. It's caused by an antibody which damages the communication receptor between the nerve and the muscle.

Myasthenia Gravis affects

all age groups, all population groups and is not gender specific. There is no known cause, nor cure, for MG. However, correct diagnosis and proper treatment can help relieve MG symptoms and much of life's activities can resume.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MG?

All symptoms worsen as

affected muscles are used, and usually improve when rested. Not all symptoms may occur at onset of this disease but will progress without a correct diagnosis and proper treatment.

DOUBLE VISION: Double vision can be vertical or horizontal. Persons with Myasthenia Gravis often see two

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ASK THE EXPERT



ALEXANDER CHASE CASTILLO, MD, DHR HEALTH PLASTIC & RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY INSTITUTE

Breast Cancer Awareness Month: Should I get breast reconstruction surgery?



Breast reconstruction after cancer is an individual choice as each patient undergoes a personalized oncologic treatment plan. Reconstruction can be a challenging topic to consider, given the already difficult situation at hand; however, numerous studies have been published

that demonstrate an increase in quality of life for patients and an improved sense of 'self' after breast reconstruction.

In my experience, many reconstruction patients are happy they chose to undergo reconstruction and look forward to sharing their experience with patients in similar circumstances. Breast reconstruction is not necessary, but

it is an opportunity for cancer-survivor patients to feel 'whole' again after a life-changing experience, as in surviving breast cancer. Depending on the cancer treatment undertaken, there may be different options available.

At the DHR Health Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery Institute, we are able to provide multiple reconstruction options to our community,

such as implant-based reconstruction or using the patient's own tissue in reconstruction. These options are largely tailored to the patient's previous oncologic treatment. Breast reconstruction is a journey that can be done at the same time as oncologic treatment (or shortly thereafter) or can be started years after cancer treatment. Some patients desire to have reconstruction

right away, and some desire to wait until they are ready — and that's OK, too!

One last topic that might cause patients to shy away from reconstruction is insurance coverage. In 1998, the United States government passed the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act (WHCRA), which is a federal law

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images of a single object, each slightly displaced from the other. Vision is worse when reading, driving or watching TV. More than 50% of people first have symptoms involving vision.

DROOPING EYELID: More than 50% of people with Myasthenia Gravis first have symptoms involving problems with the eyes, often drooping of both or one of the eyelids.

FACIAL MUSCLE CONTORTION/LIMITED FACIAL EXPRESSIONS: Weakness of muscles used for facial expression may lead to overall facial weakness becoming increasingly difficult to hold the mouth closed. Myasthenia Gravis patients may develop a snarling appearance when attempting to smile, or may end up with a blank, expressionless face. In extreme cases, complete facial paralysis may occur.

CHOKING AND DIFFICULTY SWALLOWING: This happens to MG patients when muscles that aid swallowing begin to weaken. Food stays in one's mouth despite the attempt to swallow and may lead to choking. This often happens when larger mouthfuls of food or liquid is trying to be swallowed.

SLURRED SPEECH: Speech may sound normal at the beginning of a sentence or two, then gradually becomes slurred, often to the point of being unable to be understood. When speech deteriorates in this manner, if a person with Myasthenia Gravis stops speaking, resting the muscles of the larynx (voice box) for a brief period of time, speech may become normal until once more 'over use' causes speech to slur again.

WEAKNESS IN NECK, ARMS AND LEGS: In some patients with MG, the head can not be held upright for long periods of time. Arm movement raised above chest level may be difficult and limited, especially when lifting an object. Walking any distance may become "sluggish" giving the feeling that weights are attached to legs. Going up stairs can become difficult.

BREATHING TROUBLE: Shortness of breath, difficulty taking a deep breath or coughing. Myasthenia Gravis, in and of itself, is not a

fatal condition. However, effects of this disease can be fatal when a correct diagnosis and correct treatment are not given. Many medications can cause an MG crisis, which can in some cases require life support systems.

Early detection is key to managing Myasthenia Gravis. The onset of the disease is usually gradual over weeks or months, but may be more sudden. Symptoms may come and go over time, and even resolve completely for months or longer.

Symptoms are most often not immediately recognized as Myasthenia Gravis, especially if they are subtle or variable. Many individuals may not develop all of the symptoms of MG or some may be added over time.

If a Myasthenia Gravis patient's ability to breathe, cough, or protect their airway becomes insufficient, it is called a Myasthenic crisis. These patients require prompt treatment, and may need mechanical breathing assistance in a hospital for a period of time until their strength improves.

For more information, visit <https://myasthenia.org> Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America (MGFA).

SUPPORT IN THE RGV

There is a Myasthenia Gravis (MG) Support Group locally. It meets the first Saturday of each month at the Knapp Medical Conference Center, 1401 E. 8th St. in Weslaco, in Conference Room No. 1. A blue sign for the office of the Knapp Community Care Foundation is in front of the Conference Building. For information, call (956) 254-3510.

The support group was founded by Karen Mau after her MG was stabilized. Her symptoms began with the eye, and were gradually added one by one, until she had all the symptoms of Myasthenia Gravis.

"With Myasthenia Gravis, outward symptoms are not noticeable by other people unless it is a 'bad MG' day," Mau said. "The comment is 'you look good.' They don't understand what is going on within the body. It is very rare to find anyone who knows Myasthenia Gravis and what someone with this disease goes through daily."

Frustration and loneliness can affect a

sufferer when others expect a Myasthenia Gravis patient to do tasks that they used to perform regularly. The MG RGV Support Group reminds attendees they are not alone.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Karen Mau and her husband moved to the Rio Grande Valley in 2014.

By 2016, she had all the symptoms of Myasthenia Gravis at age 75, and dismissed them as old age.

"I had not known symptoms of MG were anything other than weak muscles," Mau said. "Looking back several years before the MG diagnosis, the symptoms were a gradual accumulation. It wasn't until the final MG symptom of slurred speech, not having an explanatory cause, that a diagnosis was sought."

An ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat) specialist was consulted, and she received an incorrect diagnosis of bulging palette.

Through her family physician, Mau was admitted to a hospital for tests. After three days of nearly 24-hour procedures, and using multiple confirmational tests, the diagnosis was Myasthenia Gravis.

During the testing, Mau got very little sleep and went into Myasthenia Gravis exacerbation, which is common in autoimmune diseases. She checked in with almost full function, and left the hospital requiring a wheelchair to leave her home.

Mau struggled until finding a neurologist with knowledge of MG. She received proper medications, and her MG was stabilized.

"Prior to receiving the correct treatment, I often could not manage personal hygiene without gasping for breath making it necessary to lie down and rest to regain strength for continuing," Mau said. "After being released from the hospital, I did extensive Myasthenia Gravis research on every reliable medical site that could be found. Since there are so many neuro-muscular diseases that are considered 'rare', medical professionals focus on the most common. Consequently, few are knowledgeable about Myasthenia Gravis, and most sadly, not even some neurologists."

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health care for the culture and people in the region.

"I'm all about my people. I'm all about my community," he said. "And that is where my heart is."

Salinas recently accepted national awards from the Emergency Nurses Association for nursing practice and professionalism, and the "20 Under Forty" list, which highlights leaders for their exemplary work.

Salinas' reach in the Rio Grande Valley goes far beyond nursing, with his work as president of the Kiwanis Club of Edinburg and as chair of the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District Student Health

Advisory Council.

Salinas, who has been an active member of ENA since 2014, believes wholeheartedly in the mission of ENA and has benefited from numerous scholarships and grants, which paid for his doctoral education in full. He served as the 2021 president of the Rio Bravo Chachalacas chapter, the 2022 Texas ENA state director and other roles.

"ENA has changed my life," he said. "They believed in me. They've invested in me."

His ultimate goal, he said, is to become a fellow in the Academy of Emergency Nursing and continue to build on his research, which focuses on challenges and needs of pediatric mental health and behavioral emergency

issues in emergency departments.

But he hopes his impact goes beyond research and the ED.

"What I care about is showing other kids that might have the same upbringing that I did that it's possible and it can be done," he said. And, calling out the area code for Texas' Rio Grande Valley, he added: "I want people to say this kid made it, he was from the 956 and he had a big impact in what he did."

This story was previously published in ENA Connection magazine. The Emergency Nurses Association is the premier professional nursing association dedicated to defining the future of emergency nursing. For information, visit ena.org.

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that provides protection and coverage to patients who choose to have breast reconstruction in connection with a mastectomy.

This law applies to both group-health plans and individual health-

insurance policies.

To discuss breast reconstruction options or get more information from one of our experts, call DHR Health Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery Institute at (956) 362-8160.

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healthCalendar

Grief support meeting

Selah Hospice Care hosts a grief support meeting at 5:30 p.m. the last Thursday of each month except November and December at McAllen Public Library, 4001 N. 23rd St. in McAllen. The group is open to anyone dealing with loss. For more information, call Martha Olivares at (956) 601-0390.

Prostate cancer support group

US TOO Prostate Cancer support group meets at 6 p.m. the first Thursday of each month at Texas Oncology Community Room. For more information, call Anthony Sala or Thomas Glasscock at (956) 687-5150.

Pink Positive cancer support

Pink Positive Breast Cancer 101 meets at 6 p.m. the last Wednesday of each month at Texas Oncology Community Room. For information, contact Marcia Gonzales-Acosta at (956) 454-1168 or Ana Hernandez at (956) 687-5150.

Women In Need Growing Stronger

Have you experience childhood trauma that inhibits your ability to have a full meaningful adult life? WINGS is a free weekly support and educational program addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences. Sessions are held at noon and 6 p.m. Wednesdays. For more information or to register, visit www.bluesunday.org/wings or call (956) 299-0564.

Autism support group meetings

Bebo's Angels offers a monthly support group for parents and family members with someone in the autism spectrum from 6 to 8 p.m. the second to last Thursday of each month at the South Texas College Pecan Campus, Building "J" rooms 1.214 and 1.216. Childcare is provided. For information, call (956) 283-5898.

Texas Oncology offers support

Texas Oncology McAllen offers bilingual support group and educational seminars at 6 p.m. the last Wednesday of each month at Texas Oncology, 1901 S. Second St. in McAllen. For information, call Ana Hernandez at (956) 687-5150 or Marcia Gonzalez-Acosta at (956) 454-1168. This program is open to breast cancer patients and their family or friends free of charge.

Second Chance AA meetings

Second Chance AA group meets at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at the First United Methodist Church, Highway 107 and Monmack Street in Edinburg. Call Dennis at (956) 642-6955 for information.

AA meetings

If you want to drink, that's your business. If you want to stop, we can help. Call Alcoholics Anonymous at (800) 930-3215 or Spanish at (956) 322-4846 or visit www.aargvdist10.org.

Overeaters Anonymous

Is food a problem for you? Do you eat when you're not hungry? Do you binge, purge or restrict? Is your weight affecting

your life? Overeaters Anonymous meets at 6 p.m. Monday at St. John's Episcopal Church, 2500 N. 10th St. in McAllen. The meeting is in the library, located in Parish Hall, behind the church. Exit off 10th Street on the south side of the church. For information, call Carmen at (956) 884-9909 or visit www.oa.org.

Lactation Care Center-RGV

Lactation Care Center is a specialty clinic providing assistance to mothers that are experiencing breastfeeding challenges. Services are provided to all breastfeeding mothers at no charge. The clinic is staffed by nurses, lactation consultants and breastfeeding peer counselors. Hours are m 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Fridays, from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursdays and from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. the first Saturday of every month. Call for an appointment at (956) 292-7711. Drop-ins are welcomed at 3001 N. 23rd St., Suite 2, in McAllen.

Breastfeeding support

The Edinburg Chapter of La Leche League is dedicated to providing education, information, support and encouragement to mothers or mothers-to-be who want to breastfeed. La Leche League leaders are experienced mothers who have breastfed their own babies and who have been trained and accredited by La Leche League International to help parents with all aspects of breastfeeding. They are available by phone whenever you have questions. Meetings are held from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. the first Wednesday of the month at Edinburg Children's Hospital, 1102 W. Trenton Road. For information, call Jessica Flores at (956) 534-7880.

Knapp Medical seeks volunteers

Knapp Medical Center needs your help. If you have time available to dedicate in helping others, there are many opportunities to make a difference — by assisting patients, visitors and staff. There are opportunities to volunteer in the gift shop, information desk, hospice services, accounting, public relations and many other areas. Stop by the information desk at 1401 E. Eighth St. in Weslaco or call (956) 973-5144 for more information.

RGVDA cooking classes, lectures

The Rio Grande Valley Diabetes Association hosts a cooking class on the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m. at its office located at 420 S. Closner Blvd., Edinburg. Also, the RGVDA has a Do Well Be Well With Diabetes Lecture at 6 p.m. the third Tuesday of every month, also at the office. Do Well Be Well with Diabetes is a lecture by area doctors with different specializations. They come to the office and talk to an audience about the complications of diabetes and how it relates to their area of specialization. For information, call (956) 782-1900.

Mujeres Unidas support groups

Mujeres Unidas offers support groups for survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse. Contact Hilda Gracia, supportive counselor, for more information. Group meetings are held at 10 a.m. Thursdays at 511 N. Cynthia St. in McAllen. For more information, call (956) 630-4878.

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