

Health Matters

Health and Wellness Information for Our Community



Clinic Hours

Lopez Island Medical Clinic is located in Lopez Village at 103 Washburn Place.

Clinic hours:
Monday–Friday,
8:30 am– 5:00 pm

To schedule an appointment, call 468-2245 during regular hours.

Medical emergency?
Dial 911.

www.lopezislandmedical.org/

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Paramedics

Meet Caleb Pal and Jen English



Caleb and Jen take a breather outside the station with Dutch.

A little history: Before 1968 there was no such thing as the 9-1-1 emergency system in the United States. It didn't exist. When emergencies happened – a heart attack at home, a preschooler breaking a leg, a car crash with serious injuries, a stroke in the early morning hours – people had to do their best to figure it out. There were fewer hospitals back then and no interstate highway system to transport people quickly. Lopez Island's first paramedic, Marty Clark, once described the situation this way: "Emergency care meant someone throwing the patient in the back of a vehicle and driving to the hospital."

Here on Lopez, we had 9-1-1 by the 1970's, but of course there was no hospital at the end of the ambulance ride. Because our medical care is still classified as "rural, remote," the emergency medical team answering our

9-1-1 calls provides much more care and treatment than their counterparts do on the mainland. Typically, a minimum of 4 people respond to an aid call – a paramedic and a number of trained volunteer EMTs (emergency medical technicians).

The paramedic is the team leader. We have three paramedics who each work round-the-clock shifts. Tracie Red Elk joined the department as an EMT and firefighter in 2000 and became a paramedic in 2010 but unless you've dialed 9-1-1 in the last two years, you may not know the two newer members of the team, Paramedics Jen English and Caleb Pal.

Jen, Early Interest in Adventure

Jen, 25, who describes herself as an adventurous, accident-prone kid, was born in Everett and grew up in Marysville. Childhood acci-

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Lopez Paramedics Caleb and Jen

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dents meant she got to ride in the back of vehicles with flashing lights. "The paramedics and the big red trucks were really cool," she says. "I got lots of good care by the hands of good people."

She thought she might want to become one of those people when she grew up.

At age 16, Jen became a search and rescue volunteer for the Skagit County Sheriff's office. Working side-by-side with the EMTs and paramedics, she helped lost and injured hikers, administered first aid and packed folks out of the Cascades. The experience proved to be a turning point. She took EMT training and four years later obtained her paramedic certification after completing a program at Tacoma Community College. Jen worked for nine months as a paramedic in Yakima, then a year in Tacoma. She came to Lopez in the summer of 2013.

The differences are dramatic.

In Tacoma, the vast majority of calls were assaults, drug over doses, traumatic injuries like stabbings or shootings. The goal was different, too. In the city, the medic's on-the-scene time is usually less than ten minutes. Mainly they do their work in the back of the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

Lopez, of course, is another story. Here the medic's responsibilities are expanded. "We really are an extension of the physician's hand in the field. We get to do more for patients. The interventions, procedures, medications, and medical care out here are all very progressive. Really, I can't imagine doing anything else," she says.

Reaching down to pat the beautiful Dalmatian sleeping beside her desk, Jen breaks into a smile. I can almost see the light bulb in her head fire off. "Hey, let's talk about Dutch! He can have his picture in the paper instead of me!"

About that time Caleb Pal, 29, walks in the room. "He's pretty swell," he says, stroking the now-wagging dog. They explain that Dutch is pretty much part of the team, going on calls with Jen (although he does stay in the vehicle.)

Caleb, Lopez Youth Returns

Raised on the island from the age of 10, Caleb joined the Lopez Fire Department as a student volunteer at age 16. Like Jen, he's had a lot of excitement in his life. After high school he took a gap year, got his EMT certification, went to Ecuador to do volunteer work in a remote mountain village and spent four years living in a fire station as a volunteer EMT and firefighter while attending University of Idaho. Following college he moved to Huntsville, Alabama where he did government contract work. But responding to emergencies was always on his radar. He went to Galveston, Texas after Hurricane Ike ripped through the south in 2008, volunteered in Haiti with the earthquake relief effort in 2010 and returned to the south to assist with the aftermath following the April, 2011 tornados.

Coming back to Lopez was also a dream. Caleb spoke to our Fire Chief Jim Ghiglione, and the

department offered to sponsor Caleb's paramedic training at Harborview Hospital in Seattle. He graduated the rigorous program and joined the department in 2013.

The two paramedics talk about what it is like working here. They agree that one interesting factor is seeing patients they have helped on 9-1-1 calls later at the market or in the community. "You don't get that in the city!" Jen laughs.

They both appreciate the challenge of working in a job where saving a life is always a possibility.

Jen: "When you do your job well, when you're able to save a life, it's an indescribable feeling. It's not like the patients are the only ones getting something out of it, we benefit, too. It balances those times when the outcome isn't what we hope for. One of my favorite quotes comes from a mentor in paramedic school, 'We've got to be smart enough to know we can't save everyone, but stupid enough to always try!'"

Caleb laughs and nods in agreement. "You go into this kind of work knowing it's a big responsibility, you do all the training you can. Keep up on everything. Do your best. Sometimes people come to visit us after we've been able to help them. That's the best reward."



Vaccinations:

Continuing the Conversation

After decades of acceptance, some parents around the country are questioning the value of inoculating their young children. San Juan County is one of those places. According to Ellen Wilcox, Community Health Services Manager for San Juan County, our county has one of the lowest vaccination rates among school-aged children in the United States. “While we are one of the healthiest counties in the state on a number of measures, we still have a long way to go when it comes to protecting children using immunizations. We are eager to open conversations with parents about vaccine-preventable illness,” she says.

In this interview, Dr. Wilson offers the basics about vaccines and addresses some of his patients’ concerns.

How the Body Fights Germs

“Your body gets exposed to viruses and bacteria all day long,” Dr. Wilson explained. “The white blood cells take the germ, break it down into pieces, present some of those to T-cells, the T-cells present them to Beta cells and instruct them to make antibodies. This prepares the body to recognize and attack the virus or bacteria if it shows up again. It’s a small miracle that happens in your gut, in your eyes, your lungs, in cuts on your skin, all over the body.”

How Vaccines Work

Medical researchers replicate the first part of this process by isolating a virus or bacteria in the lab, breaking it apart and presenting it to the body via an injected vaccine. The body takes over from there: the T-cells do their work, the Betas theirs, antibodies are made and if the microbe shows up, it’s zapped dead.

“Vaccinations activate the most powerful weapon the body possesses: its own immune system. It’s as close to a natural cure as there is,” says Dr. Wilson. Vaccines also speed up the body’s response time. “Normally, it takes your body about seven days to go through the process of developing antibodies and mounting a full-on defense. But if you’re vaccinated, your body is ready *today*. It ramps up extremely quickly, the disease never has a chance.”

“I’m concerned that some who argue against vaccines may not have seen the research. I say this because vaccines have been challenged over and over. Enormous amounts of research have been done. The scientific proof is robust: vaccines are extremely safe, extremely effective. While there’s controversy in some people’s minds about vaccines, in the medical community there’s no question. So when there’s a question or concern, I like to have a respectful conversation with people, give them something to think about. In most cases they’ve seen information that has scared them, so I encourage them to look at study data.”

In some ways, vaccines have become a victim of their own success. As more people become vaccinated, the disease becomes a distant memory. The threat is not real any more, so parents quit vaccinating their kids.

“I would say that the rate and complications of virtually all childhood diseases in this country have been reduced dramatically with immunizations,” says Dr. Wilson. “If you go to a third world country, you’ll find parents who would beg for these vaccines. They think they’re a miracle. Actually it’s about as close as you can get. We have lost our awe of vaccines. Too bad, because they are awe inspiring.”

Dr. Wilson is concerned about San Juan County losing herd immunity. The term describes the protection a community enjoys once more than 90% of the population is vaccinated against a specific disease: isolated cases can still be found, but an epidemic is virtually impossible. Without herd immunity, the disease can recur. “We saw this exact problem here a few years ago with the outbreak of whooping cough. It generated enough fear that Lopez parents came in asking for vaccine for their children. My advice is: don’t wait. I’d love to see all kids get this incredibly amazing protection up front.”

Who Should be Vaccinated and When?

Different vaccines are important at different ages. In addition to childhood vaccines, Dr. Wilson recommends an annual flu and pneumonia shot plus shingles for those over 65. Travel vaccines too, as needed. If you have a young child, feel free to check in with Lopez Clinic for recommendations. “Some families like to begin slowly with vaccines for their children. Small steps. We are here to help everyone,” says Dr. Wilson.

Where?

In addition to the Clinic, Lopez Island Pharmacy does an impressive number of vaccinations each year. It’s quick and easy to pop in, but be sure to call in advance to verify that they offer the vaccine you need and make an appointment 468-2616. By the way, they recently won an award for the most innovative pharmacy in Washington State. Their immunization program is one of the reasons.



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Being Mortal is an Important Read

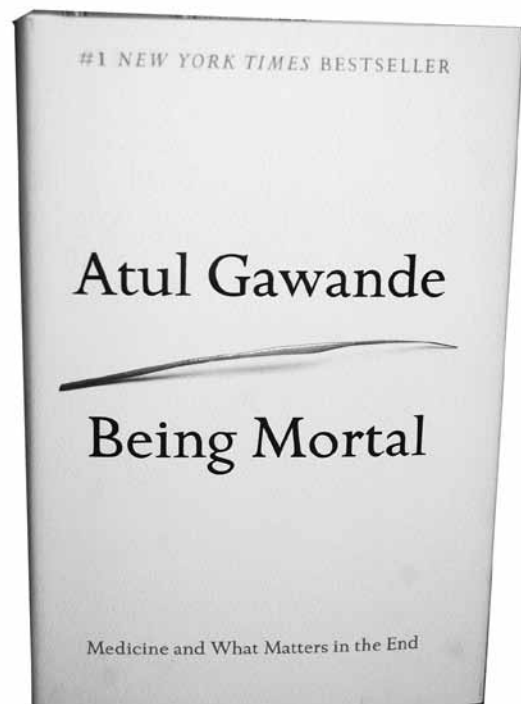
Editor's note: Ginger Lowell wrote this book review for the Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support newsletter earlier this year. We thought it deserved a wider readership. Enjoy!

Atul Gawande is a surgeon. In his best-selling book, *Being Mortal*, Dr. Gawande's journey is told through stories of his patients' travels toward the end of life.

In medical school he was taught to cure people—to diagnose their medical problems, research the symptoms, and develop a course of action that results in a cure. But there is no cure for death. And there are no cures for many of the illnesses and injuries people experience. Dr. Gawande ponders this period of time – days, months, years – during which he travels with his patients on their journeys through life. As he travels, he discerns three stages of his own. The first is the doctor's objective: define the problem, develop a course of treatment, and cure. In this stage, the doctor is playing God; the patient is a supplicant, not a participant in his own future. In the second stage, the doctor is more open with the patient, explaining the likely course of the disease or injury recovery, possible treatments, and asking the patient to make choices. Still, Dr. Gawande realizes, the doctor is controlling the choices among the several ways to die. Finally, the doctor realizes that what most people want when facing decline and death is to feel that they are in control of their quality of life.

Recognizing the importance of honoring each person's wishes and acting in ways that support those individualities is upside-down thinking for doctors who are trained

to cure, family members who are constrained by social, cultural or religious tenets, or for bureaucracies that provide a set of services in which one size fits all. We all have our own ways of living, and it's no different when we face death. Dr. Gawande knows he's reached that third stage when he asks his patients what will make them happy as they move toward death and tailors his medical advice to support that process.



Being Mortal, by Atul Gawande. Metropolitan Books/
Henry Holt and Co., 2014