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CMH and OHSU Announce New Provider Collaboration



ASTORIA, Ore. – Today, Columbia Memorial Hospital (CMH) and Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) mark the completion of a collaboration agreement set into motion in 2019. Effective July 1, 28 providers become CMH-OHSU Health employees joining the OHSU Practice Plan and representing numerous specialties, such as emergency medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, orthopedic surgery, family medicine, and pediatrics, and joining the CMH-OHSU Knight Cancer Collaborative.

The relationship between the two health care organizations bolsters the coastal communities around Astoria. More Oregonians can access services in their communities, contributing to improved health outcomes, and the next generation of rural health providers can have opportunities to train in a community hospital environment.

Nearly 10 years ago, the CMH Board of Trustees decided to partner with a larger institution to expand specialty care to the North Coast community. OHSU was the obvious choice for CMH since the vision and organizational values of the two organizations were closely aligned. “The CMH Board wanted the leverage of a larger partner to help implement an aggressive growth strategy and assistance with the ever-changing healthcare reimbursement and regulatory environment,” said Erik Thorsen, chief executive officer, CMH. “The number one priority for the CMH Board was the requirement that CMH remains an independent, community-based organization. OHSU has always been incredibly respectful of this desire.”

This collaboration allows CMH to develop a clinical and strategic relationship while meeting the needs of the community. Keeping patients close to their communities whenever possible is a central goal of all OHSU Health community affiliations.

“We are honored to now count Columbia Memorial Hospital physicians and advanced practice providers as our OHSU Health colleagues,” said John Hunter, M.D., FACS, chief

executive officer, OHSU Health. “Residents of the North Coast community rely on CMH for essential health care, and we look forward to working more closely to meet those needs and collaborate through the research and education missions of our academic health center.”

To that end, OHSU and CMH have completed the following goals:

- James Heilman, M.D., M.B.A., associate professor of emergency medicine, and associate director of strategic outreach for OHSU, has served as a full voting member on the CMH Board of Directors since 2019, and plays an essential liaison role between CMH and OHSU.
- CMH recently hired Chris Strear, M.D., as chief medical officer in Astoria. Dr. Strear will help direct clinical strategy, oversee quality metrics, and serve as a key member of the CMH executive leadership team. The CMO will also serve as a communications link between the two organizations and identify and support future joint programming.
- CMH and OHSU have now completed a structure and governance model under the new name CMH-OHSU Health where 28 providers will transition to OHSU employment while still maintaining their practices in Astoria, Warrenton or Seaside.

Patients will continue to receive excellent care from the CMH providers they know and trust. CMH-OHSU Health providers will have the professional support and academic resources to support their care and will be able to participate in educational and training opportunities.

The provider collaboration is already bringing expanded services to the Astoria community. Dr. Robert McLafferty, an OHSU vascular surgeon, sees patients in the clinic and performs surgeries so they can stay near their home for needed care. Dr. Kenneth Kolbeck will serve as the medical director of radiology as he transitions to a full-time role at CMH. Dr. Kolbeck’s specialties lie in interventional radiology, allowing CMH to expand the types of procedures they can do at the Astoria location.

Both organizations will continue to collaborate on other areas of growth that will benefit the community.

If you’d like more information or to schedule an interview with CMH, please call Nancee Long, CMH communications director, at 503-338-4650 or email nlong@columbiamemorial.org.

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