

Governor appoints new state secretary of health

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SANTA FE — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced her appointment of Dr. Tracie C. Collins, dean of the College of Population Health at the University of New Mexico, as the new leader of the New Mexico Department of Health Nov. 11. Collins will formally begin official work with the administration in mid-December.

“I’m thrilled to welcome Dr. Collins to our team,” Lujan Grisham said. “New Mexico has never needed experienced and compassionate public health leadership more than right now.

“Dr. Collins will hit the ground running as part of our state’s COVID-19 response effort with the Department of Health and indeed all of state government,” she continued.

Secretary-designate Collins, M.D. said, “I am honored and excited to serve our state as health secretary. I want to thank the governor for her confidence in me.

“This is a very challenging time for all of us,” Collins stated. “There is much work to be done to ensure the health and safety of New Mexicans. But I know the dedicated professionals of the Department of Health, and the many health care leaders throughout our state, are going to continue working tirelessly to address the needs of our diverse communities, both in this current crisis and beyond.”

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Collins has served in myriad academic leadership roles, in addition to providing clinical care and conducting and overseeing reams of clinical research. Prior to her leadership of the College of Population Health at the University of New Mexico, she served as chair of Preventive Medicine and Public Health at the University of Kansas, where she also served as the Kansas Health Foundation distinguished professor of public health and as a professor of internal medicine. At the University of Minnesota, she was co-leader of the Primary Care Research Consortium, co-director of the school's Center for Health Equity Research Core, and an associate professor of medicine. In Texas, Collins was an assistant professor of medicine at the Baylor College of Medicine and the director of the General Internal Medicine Consult Service of the Michael E. DeBaakey V.A. Medical Center in Houston.

Collins has lectured in Nepal and Kenya in addition to her clinical education and research in Oklahoma, Texas, Minnesota, Kansas and New Mexico. Collins has produced almost 80 scholarly publications over the course of her career, and she also maintains a clinical practice as a vascular specialist.

She earned a master of public health degree from the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston, Mass., where she also served as a clinical instructor, and a master of health care delivery science degree from Dartmouth College. She earned her doctor of medicine degree from the University of Oklahoma and her bachelor's degree, in chemistry, from the University of Central Oklahoma.

Secretary-designate Collins, M.D., will replace former Secretary Kathyleen Kunkel, who retired in the fall. Billy Jimenez, the Department of Health general counsel who is serving as acting secretary in Kunkel's absence, will return to his role as general counsel.