

Taking the reins

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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RMCH's Interim CEO starts Nov. 13

As Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services finds its way forward, a new Interim CEO will take the reins Nov. 13.

Veteran executive William “Bill” Patten brings experience with hospital turnarounds and transitioning rural hospitals to Critical Access Hospitals, a process RMCH started a few months ago.

The Critical Access designation allows the hospital to bill on more favorable terms and to provide extended skilled nursing care for post-acute care Medicare patients. RMCH received a \$3 million grant from the state Indian Affairs Department to help with the transition. The money will help the hospital update its electronic health records system and fund operations.

Patten has been a hospital administrator for 30 years, most recently as CEO for Taos Health System for seven years, so he’s had time to build relationships with health policymakers at the state level. Prior to joining Holy Cross Medical Center in 2015, he was CEO of Powell Valley Healthcare in Powell, Wyoming.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology from Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington, and his Master of Arts in Business with a healthcare management emphasis from Webster University in St. Louis.

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At Holy Cross, Patten is credited with improving local relationships, developing facility strategic and master plans and implementing a “Commitment to Excellence” leadership development and education initiative. He also oversaw the organization’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The New Mexico Hospital Association awarded Holy Cross its Quest for Excellence Quality Award in 2021 for the hospital’s suicide prevention efforts under Patten. In 2019 he received the American College of Healthcare Executives Senior Level Healthcare Executive Regent’s Award, which recognizes ACHE members who are experienced in the field and have made significant contributions to the advancement of healthcare management excellence and the achievement of ACHE’s goals.

“The board was impressed with the work he did up at Holy Cross. He converted that hospital to Critical Access,” RMCH Board Chair Genevieve Robran said.

She also mentioned Patten’s communication skills as a huge advantage for RMCH.

“We were really impressed with how he described his communication, both internally among the team at Holy Cross as well as externally in the community, and how transparent he was throughout,” she said.

That was welcome news to Connie Liu, leader of Community Health Action Group.

“We hope that the new CEO will be amenable to working with the community. We very much want to see our hospital succeed and would love to work hand in hand,” she said.

Former RMCH CEO Robert Whitaker left the job Oct. 29 after serving for 17 months. The hospital board was committed to filling the job as quickly as possible to minimize disruption.

Patten is officially the hospital’s Interim CEO, so the search for a permanent CEO will continue, Robran said.

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“If we find someone in three months, he’ll be out,” she said.

The board also elected officers at the board’s October meeting. Dr. Warner Anderson remains as secretary-treasurer, new member Maryann Ustick will take the vice chair seat and Robran moves up to chair.

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