

Response from RMCHCS Interim CEO Don Smithburg

Written by By Don Smithburg Interim CEO RMCHCS
Friday, 10 December 2021 07:01



We value feedback from our community, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide some context in response to Dr. Mezoff's letter.

I think we all agree Dr. Mezoff is a passionate, well-respected part of the RMCHCS and Gallup history. Though having not been directly involved with the hospital for some time, she may be unaware of the efforts undertaken this year to strengthen our operations and the progress we've achieved.

- **Transparency:** In response to community requests, beginning in October, RMCHCS opened our board meetings to the public. We solicited community feedback and are reviewing hospital financial reports with in-person and virtual attendees. This was not the first time RMCHCS responded to public concerns about board management; in 2020, the hospital restructured the board and appointed new directors due to community concerns about conflicts of interest with former leadership. I also regularly address county commission meetings and make myself available to commissioners as requested.

- **Ethical management:** Extensive media coverage in the last few years has documented mismanagement uncovered in a previous state audit. Over the last year, our team worked hard to put RMCHCS on a successful path forward. Validating that work, we completed our most recent audit in October with no findings for the first time in five years.

- **Capital improvements:** While revenue is down compared to last year due to the pandemic, RMCHCS's finances are still solid enough to invest in IT infrastructure and security, reopen and

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expand services, and make plans for the future. Most notably, work is ongoing to install a new modern call light system, while a temporary one supports safe patient care, and we break ground on renovations to our Women's Health Unit next week.

· **Nurse staffing:** Maintaining nursing staff is a significant challenge for nearly all hospitals across New Mexico and America during the pandemic. We continue to aggressively recruit nurses to ensure accessible health care resources. Hiring travel nurses to meet this goal is not unusual; hospitals across the country must do the same. Being able to rely on travel nurses allowed us to reopen our OB unit after it briefly closed in October due to a staff shortage.

· **Physicians:** We are executing necessary – sometimes unpopular – strategies to turn around the operational and financial future of the hospital. It isn't our practice to comment on individual personnel matters. However, I'm glad Dr. Mezoff mentioned our Family Medicine Residency program, which has created meaningful experiences for patients, staff and, as they would tell you, the residents themselves.

I agree with Dr. Mezoff that RMCHCS is a "crown jewel." I take my responsibility seriously to preserve our hospital's century-long legacy and protect it for the next 100 years. The majority of the RMCHCS team exudes positive energy, leading to a lot of good things happening at our hospital to improve our community's health and quality of life. I appreciate the opportunity to share our progress.

By Don Smithburg
Interim CEO
RMCHCS