

Exclusive: Virginia Hospital Center has a new CEO — and a new name

By [Sara Gilgore](#) – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
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Arlington's Virginia Hospital Center is charging forward with its regional expansion under new leadership — and a new moniker to match.

The nearly 80-year-old independent hospital, which had the same CEO for nearly half of that time, is now going forward as VHC Health. The change aims to better reflect its role in the region, said [Christopher Lane](#), the hospital's new leader since March 28.

"We're much more than a community hospital. We're a community asset that's branching out," Lane said, adding that the new identity captures "how all-encompassing the health system really is."

The rebrand, previously set in motion under longtime chief [Jim Cole](#), will take effect gradually — with the most immediate changes to its website, social media channels and digital assets, followed by signage as new sites open over time as part of its expanded ambulatory presence across the region. The goal, according to VHC, is to have a visible shift to the new name on and outside of the campus by year's end.

"I think it just really epitomizes the growth you're going to continue to see from VHC," Lane said, "as it's moving from just being hospital-centric to communitywide."

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Christopher Lane is the Arlington health system's new CEO.

VHC HEALTH

The VHC vision

Lane wasn't looking to leave Kaleida Health's Buffalo General Medical Center and Gates Vascular Institute in New York.

"I really wasn't in the market," he said. "When I got called for this opportunity and did some research, it really was a no-brainer for me."

He cites VHC's quality scores and culture as some of the draws to this job and elements he plans to maintain. He's also no stranger to the community hospital environment. Before leading the inner-city, 484-bed tertiary medical center in Buffalo, the Boston native had joined Kaleida's smallest acute-care facility, DeGraff Memorial Hospital, which he soon led as its president.

"I loved that community atmosphere," he said.

Now two weeks in, Lane said he's primarily doing his listening tour and meeting folks to understand the local organization and its role in the community.

"Following someone like Jim Cole — it's difficult. Those are big shoes to fill," he said. "The first thing I don't want to do is fumble the football."



Longtime VHC CEO Jim Cole retired earlier this year.

JOANNE S. LAWTON

A tough environment

The job comes with managing the hospital still facing down the effects of a pandemic and having to balance two models of care — maintaining normal operations while also prepping for any potential upticks in coronavirus cases, especially as reports of another variant filter in.

“That’s significantly important for us, because while we have to be there for our Covid patients, we also have to be there for the rest of the community as well,” he said.

He's coming from the flagship facility of western New York's biggest health provider in Kaleida, a \$2 billion, 8,173-employee system that had disclosed \$130 million worth of pandemic-related losses at its core hospitals since Covid's first arrival, according to a [Buffalo News report last month](#). At VHC, Lane will take the reins at a 3,150-person system that generated \$483 million in revenue and eked out \$20.7 million in operating income in the first nine months of this year through its 437-bed hospital and affiliate sites, but where it's getting increasingly harder for any hospital to maintain even the slightest margins.

Then there’s the [workforce crisis](#) confronting the industry. Nursing represents VHC’s greatest area of need, but Lane said the hospital “put a lot of aggressive tactics in place” prior to his arrival. One example: the [James B. Cole Healthcare Education Fund](#), which helps support retention of nurses and other staff with funding for education and professional development.

“The housekeeper is just as important as the neurosurgeon, who’s just as important as the pharmacist, who’s just as important as the nurse. Every single one of those team members has to be rowing in the same direction,” he said. “I think that fund and the formation of that fund really translates that well.”



The new VHC surgery center will live at McLean's 1760 Old Meadow Road, pictured here.

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The expansion strategy

The system's growth plan, however, extends well beyond its flagship campus, as it works to plant new ambulatory centers in other parts of the region.

It's too early to say where VHC will open those sites next, but "anything's on the table," including the District and Maryland, Lane said, echoing [Cole's message to us in January](#).

Thus far, there's [a McLean surgery center](#) slated to open in July or August, plus new offices in Annandale, Vienna and South Arlington. The hospital's [long-planned outpatient pavilion](#) adjacent to its campus is on track to open in May 2023, after VHC takes ownership in January.

"We want to bring the care to the community as much as we possibly can," Lane said. "That's really the best model right now: Patients want to be seen closer to home. If they need us from a hospital standpoint, we're going to be here, but we want to bring that care to them, to their community."

He also plans to expand the hospital's partnerships, such as that with OrthoVirginia, VHC's joint venture partner for the McLean surgery center, he said, "because we want to make that relationship and that linkage with our doctors in the community even stronger."

VHC's rebrand isn't its first: The hospital has been Virginia Hospital Center since July 2001, after it was founded in 1944 as Arlington Hospital. It also [isn't the first rebrand](#) for a local health system. Children's National Hospital assumed its current name in 2019, after the pediatric nonprofit [tried switching](#) from "Children's National Medical Center" to "Children's National Health System" in 2013 to highlight that its work extended beyond its hospital, though that latter brand never fully stuck.

Lane is in good company this year. He assumes the top slot alongside other newly named health system leaders in the region, including [Ryan Moran](#) at Whitman-Walker Health System, [Dr. Raj Chand](#) at Inova Fair Oaks Hospital, [Susan Carroll](#) at Inova Loudoun Hospital, [Jessica Melton](#) at Suburban Hospital, [Dr. Hasan Zia](#) at Sibley Memorial Hospital, [Dr. Tollie Elliott](#) at Mary's Center and [Dr. Jessica Henderson Boyd](#) at Unity Health Care.