

Arlington Q&A: New hospital-system chief surveys health-care landscape

Arlington Business News Featured

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Christopher Lane has been appointed new president/CEO of Virginia Hospital Center, effective March 2022. (Photo by Joseph Cascio/Kaleida Health)

Chris Lane earlier this year was tapped to succeed James Cole as CEO of VHC Health (the new name of Virginia Hospital Center and its affiliated entities).

Lane came to the local area from Kaleida Health, where he has served as president of the system's flagship hospital – Buffalo General Medical Center – and the Gates Vascular Institute since 2016.

The Sun Gazette recently conducted a question-and-answer session with Lane, now that he has had a chance to settle in.

It is a crowded and competitive health-care environment in Northern Virginia. How does VHC Health stand out from the pack?

What drew me to VHC Health is their commitment to providing top-quality patient care. Nationally, VHC Health is one of only about 8 percent of health-care organizations designated as a Magnet hospital, which is a natural differentiator. With a reputation for providing high-quality, patient-focused care and a solid financial standing, VHC provides the community with the best possible value for vital health services.

VHC Health's proven success in providing quality health-care to every individual regardless of the ability to pay, as well as the health system's capacity to provide innovative treatments and top-quality care in the setting of a true community hospital, are also remarkable and make me excited to take the helm as VHC Health enters this next chapter.

As you are settling in, have there been any surprises about the local area or its health-care scene that you had not anticipated?

As you consider the patient population served by health-care organizations across the D.C. metro area, a need for improved choice and access to care stands out. This is something that VHC has prioritized in recent years and I'm very impressed with VHC Health's long-standing commitment to health equity and bringing quality care to all members of our community. This commitment manifests itself through our work in the Outpatient Clinic, at VHC Health Pediatrics, our relationship with the Arlington Free Clinic, and our new population-health initiatives.

Access to care is a critical factor in creating healthy communities. It has been encouraging to see how many fellow business leaders in the D.C., area recognize this as a business imperative.

A major expansion project is in the works on the Arlington campus. Is all going more or less according to plan?

The Outpatient Pavilion project is on track and moving forward as scheduled. VHC has made a significant investment in new technologies to enhance the patient experience in the new facility and we're very excited to see the community benefit from these innovative services when the Pavilion opens in 2023.

VHC Health is also undertaking a very deliberate regional expansion to provide care to people where they live and offer communities the services they require most. Over the next two years we plan to open new service locations for VHC Health Physicians. Our Orthopedic Outpatient Surgery Center in Tysons, one of many strong partnerships with the hospital's independent physicians, is set to open towards the end of this year.

In terms of providing health care and the patient experience, what is different now from the pre-pandemic era, and what of those changes are likely to be permanent?

VHC Health's motto during COVID was "whatever it takes" and I plan to carry that mantra forward as a leader, working towards creative solutions to our biggest challenges.

Even before the pandemic, VHC Health was making an incredible investment in the future of health-care IT to provide the safest, most secure options for our patients and community. The pandemic expedited those initiatives, with many services transforming to provide remote-access options overnight. We moved quickly via technology to serve our community during a time of critical need and many of those adjustments are likely here to stay. We've incorporated a lot of the lessons we learned about the need to be adaptable into the construction of the Outpatient Pavilion as well to ensure that VHC Health is always prepared to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Is staffing a problem at the moment, and do you see it being one in the future, not just for VHC Health but for all health providers in the region?

If so, what is being done to address it in the short-term and long-term?

Workforce development is an ongoing focus for VHC Health. We are intently focused on building the team here at VHC, recruiting the right people for the right jobs and really listening to what our employees need. In response to feedback from our incredible team, we have recently implemented a number of successful benefit adjustments to meet the needs of the VHC Health staff, including student-loan-repayment opportunities, pay adjustments, unused vacation payouts and other innovative programs.

