



New ED partnership at KershawHealth

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At 7 a.m. July 8, KershawHealth's emergency department began a new partnership with ApolloMD, a physician services company headquartered in Atlanta.

KershawHealth CEO Terry Gunn told the hospital's board of trustees during its meeting Monday the transition was carried out "very smoothly" and that, so far, things had really gone well.

"That's been good," Gunn said. "Most of the physicians ... were with TeamHealth and that made it much easier. We're dealing with very familiar physicians and now that we're well into the first week and getting to start the second week, some of the newer physicians are starting to rotate in."

Gunn said the schedule is, essentially, full for July. He said he was impressed at how quickly ApolloMD pulled filling the schedule together.

"Kudos to Apollo. Pat, who's their physician recruiter, physician relations specialist, has just gone way out of her way to help us track down information, get things orchestrated, get orientations done on time. It's really been a good process and we really feel like we've started it on the right foot with ApolloMD," Gunn said.

In an email exchange Tuesday, Gunn said the ApolloMD agreement replaces the one with TeamHealth.

KershawHealth began negotiating the former agreement with TeamHealth, a Knoxville, Tenn., company, in February 2014. TeamHealth took over

managing KershawHealth's emergency department physicians from Columbia-based Carolina Care on July 1, 2014. Carolina Care had managed KershawHealth's emergency physicians starting in December 2011 and informed KershawHealth in December 2013 it wished to end the contract.

TeamHealth is credited with helping KershawHealth transition its emergency department to its Express Care system whereby emergency staff can assess whether a patient is suffering a life-threatening condition or has less urgent complaints. Depending on the answer, patients are either shunted through Express Care so they can be treated as they would at an outpatient center, or more directly to an emergency room.

The transition is responsible for a significant and swift decrease in emergency department wait times since Express Care's implementation in September. In fewer than eight weeks, according to KershawHealth statistics, overall wait times in the emergency department dropped 50 percent, from about 4 hours and 30 minutes to approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes.

In his email Tuesday, Gunn said TeamHealth terminated the year-old agreement, providing 90-day notice.

"We immediately initiated an RFP (request for proposals) process and determined that ApolloMD was the best all-around fit for KershawHealth and our community," Gunn wrote. "They will continue building upon our improvements in both the ER as well as our new Express Care services.

Gunn spoke about the ApolloMD contract as part of his CEO's report to the board. During his report, Gunn also said KershawHealth's joint strategic planning process with MUSC Health and Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center in Hartsville is underway. MUSC Health -- the patient care arm of the Medical University of South Carolina -- is part of a pending lease/sale of KershawHealth to Capella Healthcare of Franklin, Tenn. Capella and MUSC Health recently formed its own health network. The two companies formed the network when Capella purchased Carolina Pines on Jan. 1. Capella has offered to pay the board of trustees \$36 million to lease KershawHealth's real estate for 40 years and purchase its furniture, fixtures and equipment. When the deal closes, KershawHealth will become part of the Capella-MUSC Health Network.

"We had our kickoff meeting two weeks ago. Then, last week, our first action follow-up meeting together, where we really got some timelines," Gunn said. "Interestingly ... what we did last year with our strategic plan -- their process mirrors very similarly to what we've already done."

He said during the second week of August, the joint planning team will interview stakeholders with the help of SG2, a healthcare and hospital system consulting firm out of Skokie, Ill. Gunn said he would like to include board members in the survey/interview process.

"We expect to have a market-wide strategic plan -- and this is where we really start putting meat on the bones of the MUSC relationship ... by the third week of September," Gunn said.

Gunn also reported employee benefits enrollment to Capella's benefits system has "gone very well," with exactly 700 employees having signed on by July 10, leaving only 10 employees who have yet to enroll. He indicated the effective date of the Capella benefits would be Aug. 1.

Also, Gunn said, he and other KershawHealth executives did attend a Capella leadership orientation in Nashville. He said Capella was very welcoming, even including greeting signs and hosting a "meet and greet." Gunn said they received a vision of Capella's expectation from leadership, followed by a presentation by every department with which KershawHealth would interact.

In other business, Vice Chair Dr. Tallulah Holmstrom, who heads the board's quality efforts, turned her report over to KershawHealth Director of Quality Services Divya Reddy. Reddy briefed the board on an upcoming Joint Commission (JC) survey. The JC is the leading accrediting body for healthcare organizations in the country. Holmstrom and Reddy said the survey will likely be conducted sometime during the next three weeks. JC appearances are unannounced, Reddy said, either on a Monday or Tuesday, and be on site for three to four days.

Board Chair Karen Eckford updated the full board on activity from the executive committee, which has met twice since the board's last full meeting. The committee is made up of Eckford, Holmstrom and Trustee Steven Holliday Jr. The executive committee met June 25 and unanimously extended a letter of intent with Capella and MUSC Health to July 31. It also voted unanimously to authorize KershawHealth's staff and accountants to negotiate and, if favorable, execute certain health insurance agreements.

The executive committee also met July 9, but took no action on any matters.

The full board entered executive session at the end of Monday night's meeting. Afterward, the board voted unanimously to adopt a "d/b/a" (doing business as) name of The Health Services District of Kershaw County to be utilized following the Capella/MUSC transaction. This will be the name of the

entity governed by the current board after Capella and MUSC Health takes over KershawHealth operations, assuming the deal is finalized.

At the beginning of Monday's meeting, former Camden City Councilman Willard Polk addressed the board during public comment.

"We have seen many, many changes, some good, some bad, but I think what we're seeing now as witnessed under the new administration is an improvement in quality of care and improvement in financial operations, and we're encouraged by that," Polk said. "But we're concerned about just being able to retain what we have here, what was established with a vision of Dr. Simon Baruch over a hundred years ago, and would hope, under the new flag, that his vision and the vision of others continues for the absolute benefit of our citizens."

Polk said, however, a lack of information about the Capella deal has led him and his colleagues to reach their own conclusions.

"We have, in addition to the business aspect, even more concerns. And that is, concerns, again, to repeat myself, of your clients, your patients, particularly those in chronic care. It's a life and death situation, and we thank our caregivers who, without their skills, without their care, without their concerns, many of us would have a short lifespan," he said.

Polk ended his comments by suggesting the board vote to extend the Capella deadline to September 30 to coincide with the end KershawHealth's current fiscal year.

"So that you have a clean cutoff of all your financial and accounting matters. (Otherwise,) it takes an infinitely longer amount of time to audit and untangle and to prepare all of your financial reports," Polk said.

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