

## Holy Cross Hospital picks new CEO

By Andrew Oxford

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The next CEO of Taos Health Systems has a big job ahead and after a nine-month search, the nonprofit's board announced earlier this month it had selected a candidate.

William D. Patten will assume the role of CEO April 13, taking charge of 29-bed Holy Cross Hospital as well as a range of medical services which comprise the Taos area's largest provider of health care and a major force in the local economy.

Patten will arrive during a busy time at Taos Health Systems. Its board is expected to decide in the spring whether to proceed with a USDA loan for constructing a new building. Hospital administrators are also in talks with University of New Mexico to develop a stronger partnership. And interim CEO Cindy Bradley will be leaving Patten with a thorough inventory of deferred maintenance and aging equipment.

Meanwhile, the nonprofit continues to struggle financially.

But board chairman Ron Burnham said Patten has the credentials, energy and skill set for the job.

Patten has been the CEO of several small rural hospitals throughout the Western United States over the last 18 years.

The CEO of Powell Valley Healthcare in Powell, Wyoming, since Feb. 2012, he has also served as CEO of St. John's Lutheran Hospital in Libby, Montana, and Sitka Community Hospital in Sitka, Alaska.

Patten has a Bachelor of Science degree in medical technology from Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington. He also has a Master of Arts in business with an emphasis in health care management from Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri.

"Holy Cross Hospital and Taos Health Systems have a great deal of potential," Patten said in a press release. "I see a board, a medical staff and management team that are committed to growth and improvement and that matches my goals."

Burnham said Monday (Feb. 23) the board was looking for a candidate who could manage the nonprofit's precarious finances and develop working relationships with doctors and staff as well as the community. In announcing the selection, Burnham touted Patten's experience in "quality improvement, organizational healing, financial optimization, strategic planning and physician recruitment."

The selection of a new CEO follows the departure in July of Peter Hofstetter, who had been CEO since 2009.

Patten will replace interim CEO Bradley, who has led Taos Health System's day-to-day operations since Dec. 1.

During her tenure, the organization has taken stock of deferred infrastructure investments and continued to explore a closer relationship with UNM, which could include the university taking over medical direction of and physician staffing in the emergency department. In the short term, the university may provide visiting doctors to fill vacancies.

Continuing to rebuild cash reserves, recruit staff and keep the hospital's facilities up-to-date will likely be priorities for the incoming CEO.

The search for a new CEO was led by Quorum Health Resources, a private consulting firm contacted by the nonprofit's board to provide administrative services such as executive staffing. Patten will be an employee of Quorum Health Resources. A press release issued Feb. 18 noted he "will report directly the Taos Health Systems Board of Trustees."

The board had asked Quorum Health Resources for and was presented with three vetted, qualified candidates, Burnham said.

Staff, board members and administrators reportedly met with Patten as well as another candidate, Janet Sternberg, over the last several months. Sternberg is a registered nurse and hospital administrator who formerly served as president and CEO of Huron Medical Center in Michigan.

Burnham said the board was patient in selecting a candidate in part out of caution about high turnover in the job market for hospital administrators.

"We felt strongly we wanted to put the right person in that role," Burnham said. "We were looking for somebody who was excited about coming to Taos."

Bradley will continue to serve as interim CEO until Patten assumes the post. He is relocating from Wyoming with his wife of 38 years, Cindy, with whom he has two adult sons.

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Courtesy photo

William D. Patten Jr.