

Central Florida Health Partners With UF Health

Initiative targets expanded patient care, training, boost in health care providers.

By **LARRY D. CROOM**
Daily Sun Ombudsman

Central Florida Health is joining forces with the University of Florida Health Shands hospital system to collaborate on new health care initiatives.

The agreement, which marks the second time the two medical entities have worked together in a partnership, seeks to expand access to leading-edge patient care programs and clinical studies for local residents, as well as increase the number of primary care physicians available to see patients in the tri-county area.

"This affiliation is an acknowledgment of the great care we already offer, and a means to find ways of coordinating care for patients from our local community who have especially complex medical problems we don't typically treat," said Don Henderson, president and CEO of CFH, parent company of The Villages Regional Hospital and Leesburg Regional Medical Center.

As part of the agreement, CFH, a 626-bed not-for-profit health care system that is the most comprehensive provider of health care services in the region, and UF Health, the Southeast's most comprehensive academic health center with main campuses in Gainesville and Jacksonville, will work together in an effort to create training opportunities for primary care physicians and other health care professionals at both area hospitals. According to Henderson, that's particularly important because the local population is growing rapidly and already has surpassed 117,000 residents in The Villages alone.

"A recent study showed that in the next 10 years, Florida will need 35 percent more primary care physicians than it has now," Henderson said, adding that

training opportunities also are being explored for nurses, pharmacists, support technicians, medical staff members, etc. "Older doctors also are retiring, and with the population growth, we've got to be ready. So we're working together to come up with the details."

Henderson said there's also another important element involved in providing training for primary care doctors in the tri-county area.

"About 75 percent of doctors who train in an area remain in that area," he said. "So it's really a nice setup with (the University of Florida) close by. They will have the local medical community and the higher-level medical center nearby when they need that level of service."

Ed Jimenez, chief executive officer of UF Health Shands, said one of the things driving

this partnership is the common set of values shared by both health care providers.

"Our discussions are centering on how we can combine our talents and resources to better address challenges facing the health care industry and improve the coordination of care to overcome barriers patients face in accessing the help they need," he said. "This relationship is about adding health care treatment options for the area's residents."

This new partnership follows another successful venture between CFH and UF Health to provide comprehensive stroke care to patients when needed. Under that agreement, UF Health physicians accept transfer patients from CFH facilities and provide around-the-clock access to consultations with a vascular neurologist regarding treatment plans and decisions related to the administering of the clot-busting drug tPA, as well as educational opportunities about the latest in

stroke care. And The Villages Regional Hospital, through its rehabilitation facility, often-times provides additional care for those stroke patients after they've been released from Shands.

As for the latest partnership, Henderson said it provides an avenue for both area hospitals to raise the bar in patient care to an even higher level when needed.

"It is important for us to work with a comprehensive academic health center like UF Health because it affords us the ability to continually offer our patients the latest medical breakthroughs," Henderson said.

Jimenez agreed. "We are looking forward to working together as we collectively seek to provide the highest-quality, most compassionate care possible, with superior outcomes for the patients we both serve," Jimenez said. "We also are excited about exploring new opportunities related to our community service, medical education and research activities."

LOCAL NEWS

LEADING HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS TEAM UP

Central Florida Health, parent company of The Villages Regional Hospital and Leesburg Regional Medical Center, will work alongside the University of Florida Health Shands hospital system to expand access to leading-edge patient care programs and clinical studies for local residents, provide training opportunities and eventually increase the number of primary care physicians available to see patients in the tri-county area.

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