

An Eventful First Year for Physician CEO

Q&A WITH STEPHEN REINTJES, SR., MD, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF NORTH KANSAS CITY HOSPITAL AND MERITAS HEALTH

It has been over a year since Stephen L. Reintjes, Sr., MD, was appointed president and CEO of North Kansas City Hospital in January 2020. To provide a smooth transition, retiring President and CEO Peggy Schmidt served in an advisory role until July 2020—as COVID-19 brought new and unplanned challenges.

Dr. Reintjes shares his thoughts on his first year as NKCH CEO, the COVID-19 pandemic and physician leadership with *Kansas City Medicine*.

A neurosurgeon, Dr. Reintjes has been a respected and engaged member of the North Kansas City Hospital medical staff for 30 years. Prior to his appointment as CEO, he held numerous executive leadership positions at the hospital, including director of spine surgery and medical staff president.

Dr. Reintjes, a Kansas City native, graduated from the University of Kansas School of Medicine and completed his neurosurgery residency at KU Medical Center. His undergraduate degree is from Georgetown University.

How have you prepared yourself for leadership positions?

Throughout my medical career, I participated in various health care and civic initiatives. In 2008, I was president of the Kansas City Medical Society (at the time named the Metropolitan Medical Society). Prior to that, I worked with a coalition of physicians to change Missouri's tort reform laws in 2004. While these roles gave me a deeper understanding of leadership in the health care space, serving on the boards of BioNexus KC, Midwest Transplant Network and Saint Luke's Hospital provided



(Photo by North Kansas City Hospital)

exposure to leaders from all corners of the community, which was an invaluable experience.

How does having a physician CEO benefit the hospital?

As a physician, I worked alongside care providers and spent time at the patient's bedside. This experience helped me understand what care providers want and patients need. As CEO, I use this knowledge to balance the needs of staff and the community we serve.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, what's been your North Star in managing the hospital's response?

During the pandemic, we entered uncharted territory. At times, it felt like a lot to navigate. But, as long as we continued to run toward the sick and serve those in need, I knew we were doing the right thing for the right reason.

What have been your successes?

Most recently, I've taken great pride in our contributions to Operation Safe, the

Northland coalition that's administered over 97,331 vaccines to eligible Missourians. In addition to meeting the ever-changing needs of our COVID-19 patients and the community, we continued to provide lifesaving stroke, trauma and heart attack treatment, eventually earning The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval® and certification for Comprehensive Cardiac Center, Advanced Total Hip and Total Knee Replacement, and Primary Stroke Center. Equally important, we took care of our own, avoiding employee furloughs and raising the minimum base wage to \$15 per hour.

What do you find most satisfying about leadership?

I take great satisfaction in working with a talented team of professionals who are dedicated to fulfilling our mission. When hospitals around the country struggled to care for COVID-19 patients, everyone pitched in to adapt to the needs of our patients, employees and the community. Then, when our COVID-19 census dropped and we saw an uptick in available vaccines, we rose to that occasion, too, partnering with Operation Safe to vaccinate the community. To serve with this group of compassionate, capable individuals is an honor.

What is the biggest thing you've learned in the past year as CEO?

I've had a firsthand look at the bravery of care providers and the dedication of health care leaders. When it comes to caring for their patients and the community, I've learned they'll stop at nothing. 🙏