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Kootenai Health has new leader

COEUR d'ALENE - A new leader will soon be at the helm of Kootenai Health. The organization announced Friday that Jon Ness, now Chief Operating Officer at Billings Clinic, in Billings, Mont., will take over Sept. 27 as Kootenai Health's CEO.

Ness replaces Joe Morris, who announced his retirement in January. Morris is leaving Kootenai Health after 37 years with the organization, and feels he's leaving the health care organization in good hands.

"Of all the candidates interviewed, Jon is the best fit for Kootenai's culture," Morris stated, in a press release.

Ness was offered the CEO position following a nationwide search. He brings 24 years of executive level hospital and clinic experience with him. He earned his master's degree at North Dakota State University in Fargo, N.D.

Morris has been with what was then called Kootenai Memorial Hospital since 1974. He became CEO in 1981. The hospital's services and facilities expanded significantly during Morris' tenure. In the 1980s, a new hospital was built and later the cancer and heart centers were added.

"Kootenai Health is an outstanding facility with a reputation for excellence," Ness said. "I am pleased to become a part of the health care team that has accomplished so much, and my family is looking forward to joining the community."

The Billings Clinic, Ness' current employer, has many similarities to Kootenai Health. They are both not-for-profit health care organizations, governed by their communities, and are the largest employers in those communities.

"Jon not only had the experience we were looking for; he brings a wealth of new ideas that will help Kootenai move into the future as it meets the new challenges brought about by health care reform legislation," said Paul Anderson, chairman of the Kootenai Hospital District board of trustees, in a prepared statement.

The CEO reports to the Kootenai Hospital District board of trustees and is responsible for the operation of all Kootenai Health services and programs. This includes the medical center, cancer center, heart center, behavioral health, diabetes and endocrinology, rehabilitation services, diagnostic imaging, Kootenai Physicians Clinics, as well as joint ventures with Kootenai MRI, Kootenai Outpatient Imaging, Kootenai Outpatient Surgery and Kootenai Laboratories.

Morris will work closely with Ness for a brief transition period, and will also be available to complete projects, board commitments and offer consultation through May 2011.