

New Cascade Medical Center chief says independence works - for now

Charles Johnston has over 30 years of management experience

BY MAX SILVERSON

For The Star-News

The new chief executive officer of Cascade Medical Center said this week there is no current effort to seek a large system takeover of the hospital.

"I think for now our board and community feels that being independent fits us better," Charles Johnston said in an interview this week with The Star-News.



Charles Johnston

Johnston, 66, comes to Cascade from Oklahoma City, Okla., he replaces former CEO Chris Bjornberg, who resigned in April.

Johnston's resume includes 30 years of experience in hospital administration in Oklahoma and Oregon.

He received a bachelor of business administration and earned a master of business administration, graduating with honors in 1984 from the University of

Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Okla.

Johnston will be paid \$150,000 per year by the Cascade Medical Center Hospital District, the public agency that owns and operates the hospital.

Johnston does not immediately see the Cascade hospital following McCall Memorial Hospital, which merged with St. Luke's Health System in 2010 and became St. Luke's McCall. However, all options remain on the table.

"The door is open to discuss that at any time, but the board feels comfortable with the position we're in," he said.

Challenges Ahead

The ever-changing healthcare system and general financial reimbursement issues for all hospitals are the main challenges that Johnston sees.

"For most small hospitals, just staying open and being available to provide services to the public is the main challenge," he said.

"We're currently in transition, but our goal is always to provide personal and professional quality healthcare for our patients," he said.

Immediate priorities for the medical center focus on recruiting and retaining vital staff, he said.

"My role right now is to make sure we have top-notch physician coverage," Johnston said. "That's the mode

we're in now - recruiting doctors for our community."

The medical center, opened in 1974, provides physical therapy, an emergency room, laboratory and X-ray services as well as behavioral health, with short term and long term care available.

The 10,454 square-foot

center is designated as a Critical Access Hospital and Rural Health Clinic, with 10 beds and about 50 employees.

The center has a total budget for this year of about \$3.5 million, CMC Director of Finance Kimberley Dalrymple said.

The medical center saw

1,039 emergency room patients, 6,917 outpatients and 3,829 visits to the clinic in 2016, Dalrymple said.

The community is invited to attend a barbecue on Aug. 29 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Masonic Lodge in Cascade, to meet Johnston as well as medical center providers.

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