



News Release

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Haywood and WestCare announce formal agreement to form MedWest Health System

The governing board of Haywood Regional Medical Center has approved a joint operating agreement (JOA) with WestCare Health System, which includes Harris Regional Hospital, Swain County Hospital and other healthcare facilities serving a four-county area in Western North Carolina. The JOA is now official, as WestCare's governing board approved the JOA Oct. 13. The new organization will be known as "MedWest Health System."

Representatives of the two healthcare organizations have been working on the JOA since spring, when plans were first announced to integrate operations. Mark Clasby, chairman of Haywood Regional's governing board of commissioners, said the agreement "reflects a strong consensus within our local communities that integration of facilities and resources is the best way to ensure the continuation and growth of comprehensive healthcare services."

Fred Alexander, chairman of WestCare's board of trustees, echoed these sentiments, adding that the JOA will help ensure that high quality services remain available close to home.

"This new relationship," Alexander said, "will enhance our ability to attract the very best physicians, nurses and technicians to our area. Additional benefits include increasing access to care, reducing healthcare costs to patients, and improving patient outcomes."

Alexander helped unveil the new MedWest logo, featuring a blue and green mountain-themed design. He said the logo will be increasingly visible to the public, and will be adopted officially when a Joint Operating Company is in place to manage combined activities.

Clasby said the Joint Operating Company is expected to be up and running in January 2010. At that time, he said, Haywood Regional and WestCare will execute a management services agreement with Carolinas HealthCare System, based in Charlotte.

Hospital officials said ultimate responsibility for oversight will be vested in a newly formed governing board; however, the existing hospital boards will remain in place with authority to oversee specific reserved functions. For example, the individual boards will continue to approve credentials for their respective medical staffs; to make decisions regarding sale, lease or distribution of current assets; and to approve new members of the Joint Operating Company.

Clasby expressed thanks to members of a joint study commission that has been working since spring to oversee the details of integration and prepare the accompanying legal documents.

“They have worked in a very cooperative spirit that has enabled us to keep pace with deadlines and maintain a sharp focus on enhancing healthcare delivery for the people of our region,” he said.

Michael C. Tarwater, chief executive officer of Carolinas HealthCare System, said his organization was pleased and honored to be a part of the new affiliation.

He noted that it is a growing trend for smaller hospitals to maintain some type of affiliation with a larger system, “because the economics of the times make it very difficult for small, independent hospitals to keep up with current demands.”

“A management services agreement,” Tarwater said, “helps to ensure access to a much broader array of resources, which are needed to meet the challenges they face today. Advantages include group purchasing opportunities and sharing best practices in areas such as financial management, staff recruiting, safety and quality improvement.”

Tarwater attributed Carolinas HealthCare’s growth to a firm commitment to local needs and sensitivities.

“Decisions about growth, medical services and customer relations,” he said, “need to be guided by the people whose families will be affected by those decisions. We have a proud tradition of respecting that principle, and we are somewhat unique in that respect.”

Haywood Regional Medical Center (www.haymed.org) was established in 1927. The current facility opened in 1979 and is licensed for 170 acute care beds. It is the third largest employer in Haywood County with more than 900 employees.

WestCare Health System (www.westcare.org) was formed in February 1997 when Harris Regional Hospital and Swain County Hospital combined to develop a full spectrum of health services. WestCare employs almost 1,200 full and part time employees and has a medical staff of more than 90 physicians representing 22 specialties.

Haywood Regional and WestCare have announced plans to affiliate with Carolinas HealthCare System (www.carolinashealthcare.org), one of the leading healthcare providers in the Southeast. The newly integrated network, to be called MedWest Health System, will enhance its commitment to the people of Western North Carolina by improving the quality of available services, offering new services, and providing more people with access to needed care. Carolinas HealthCare has 29 affiliated hospitals in North and South Carolina.

For more information, contact:

Peggy Manning, Corporate Communications Specialist
Haywood Regional Medical Center
publicrelations@haymed.org
(828) 452-8883
www.haymed.org

Brian Thomas, Marketing and Public Relations Coordinator
WestCare Health System

brian_thomas@westcare.org
828-586-7432
www.westcare.org

Gail Rosenberg, Ass’t Vice President/Public Relations
Carolinas HealthCare System
gail.rosenberg@carolinas.org
704-355-3141
www.carolinashealthcare.org