

Wellstar Names New CEO

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Staff reports

The Wellstar Board of Trustees has named Ketul J. Patel as Wellstar Health System's next president and CEO.

Patel is CEO of Virginia Mason Franciscan Health and president of the Pacific Northwest Region of CommonSpirit Health.

He is expected to join Wellstar in late October.

Patel will succeed Candice Saunders, Wellstar's president and CEO, who announced her retirement in January.



"We were fortunate to consider nearly 200 outstanding candidates from across the health care industry, including several strong internal leaders who reflect Wellstar's deep talent," said former Wellstar Board of Trustees Chair Frank Ros, who led the search committee. "Ketul stood out for his experience leading transformational growth while remaining focused on the needs of team members, patients, and the community."

In his current role, Patel is responsible for 12 hospitals, more than 300 patient care locations, and 20,000 team members, including more than 5,600 employed and affiliated providers.

In January 2021, Patel led the merger of two of the Pacific Northwest's leading health care organizations to form Virginia Mason Franciscan Health (VMFH), which today is one of Washington state's largest premier health care providers. Under Patel's leadership, VMFH became the only health system in Washington state to earn all "A" Leapfrog Patient Safety Grades, ranking among the best facilities in the nation, according to Wellstar.

Patel launched the VMFH Care Network in 2024 to provide expertise to independent hospitals and health systems throughout Washington, Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Montana. He oversees the Benaroya Research Institute, which is internationally recognized for autoimmune disease research, and the Bailey-Boushay House, the first skilled nursing and outpatient chronic care management program in the U.S. designed specifically to meet the needs of people with HIV/AIDS, Wellstar reports.

"It's an honor to join the Wellstar team and help carry forward its mission of providing compassionate, world-class care to every person, every time," Patel said. "Thanks to the leadership of Candice and her strong executive team, Wellstar is positioned to be one of the Southeast's leading health care providers for years to come. I'm excited about the potential created by Wellstar's forward-thinking investments in

technology and innovation, strategic partnerships with academic organizations such as Augusta University's Medical College of Georgia, and its strong reputation as a great place to work.

"On a personal note, I look forward to becoming engaged in the metro Atlanta community and working alongside policymakers to expand access to care throughout Georgia."

Patel is a three-time honoree on Modern Healthcare's list of the 100 most influential people in health care. He chairs the Washington State Hospital Association board and is past chair of the Greater Seattle Partners executive council. He also serves on the boards of Washington Roundtable, Challenge Seattle, and CEOs Against Cancer, and is a past member of the American Hospital Association Regional Policy Board.

Patel holds master's degrees in health administration and business administration from the University of Pittsburgh and a bachelor's degree from Johns Hopkins University.

"As we grow and evolve, it's essential to have a leader who embraces both the heart and the strategy of health care," said Saunders. "Ketul's ability to connect with people on a personal level while navigating complex challenges ensures Wellstar will continue to thrive as a people-centered, forward-thinking organization."