

Merced Sun-Star

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Livingston Medical Group gets new CEO

By DANIELLE GAINES
dgaines@mercedsun-star.com

John Alexander still remembers the first community health clinic he visited.

It was in Westley, a small school-based clinic with one doctor, one dentist and needy patients to the rafters.

"I realized, 'Gosh, these people are doing great work,' " said Alexander, who was drawn toward a career in health care despite his aversion to "blood and guts."

So he went to college at California State University, Stanislaus, ultimately earning a master's degree in business administration with an emphasis on staffing patterns at community health centers.

Now Livingston Medical Group has named Alexander as its new chief executive officer.

Alexander previously served as the executive director of the Merced County Health Care Consortium.

"I have been waiting my whole life for an opportunity like this," Alexander said last week, not long after he was formally introduced to the clinic's staff.

He's got big shoes to fill.

Alexander replaces Aurora Garcia, who retired after 39 years with the group.

Garcia told the Sun-Star last August that she planned to retire after working at the Main Street clinic almost as long as it has been around.

Last year, Garcia received The Lifetime Achievement in Migrant Health Award at the National Farmworkers Health Conference in Puerto Rico.

Garcia and Alexander have been working side-by-side in a second-floor office space at the clinic for the past few weeks during the transition. Alexander said he was excited to be back in a "hands-on, get-things-done atmosphere."

His first job in health care was at Golden Valley Health Centers in 2000 as the clinic's first human resources director, hired by current Golden Valley head Mike Sullivan.

Since 2000, Alexander has worked as the regional human resources director for PeaceHealth in Oregon, director of special projects at the Central Valley Health Network, chief operations officer for Clinica Sierra Vista in Bakersfield, in addition to the consortium.

Sullivan said Alexander's appointment was "great," because he understands the ins and outs of running a community health center.

"His challenges will be that this is not the greatest time to be running a community health center with the cuts we are facing," Sullivan said. "He will have to roll up his sleeves and look closely at the financial situation."

Alexander has already announced that employees will undergo new performance evaluations, which were not up to date, and posted in his blog that expected pay raises won't arrive.

"Many people are expecting pay increases in the near future," he wrote. "If each person received a \$1 per hour raise (times 2,000 hours per year and 75 people) it would increase our costs by another \$150,000 annually. We cannot afford to make those kinds of promises at this time."

On top of that, Alexander must maneuver MediCal reforms through the Central Coast Alliance for Health that starts in October, and federal health care reform, which is also a very real possibility.

"It's definitely more challenging than ever, but it is also more opportunity than ever," Alexander said. "I'm up for the challenge. Very excited."

Sullivan said the board of the health care consortium -- comprised of representatives from seven area medical groups -- has already interviewed candidates to replace Alexander there.

The board hopes to hire someone in the near future, he added.

Livingston Medical Group is one of California's oldest nonprofit community health centers and serves low-income families in Livingston, Delhi, Stevinson, Hilmar, Cressey and Ballico.

Reporter Danielle Gaines can be reached at (209) 385-2407 or dgaines@mercedsun-star.com.