

MEDICAL from page 1A

But keeping nurses like Davidson in Florence can be a challenge. From housing issues to overall provider and nursing shortages in the industry, staffing rural hospitals can be a challenge. This was of particular concern a few years ago, as Peace Harbor's wait times stretched into hours, and sometimes days. Since then, the hospital has worked on creating more positions, increasing employee benefits and nurturing innovation in the system.

"The way we see it now, I think we're close to the positions that we need to fill," Peace Harbor Chief Administrative Officer Jason Hawkins said. "If we can keep them filled, we're in better shape than we have been in a long time. I can't speak to years and years gone by, but speaking to the other nurses in times gone by, they've commented that it's getting better."

Peace Harbor's struggles with employee retention became public debate in 2016 and 2017, when several care providers and one general surgeon left the community at the same time, followed by a protracted contract negotiation between the Oregon Nurses Association and PeaceHealth.

"I would say that it was kind of a baseline model that didn't have a lot of redundancy built in," Hawkins said.

The issue was not that the medical center did not have positions filled, but that they did not have enough positions to cover sudden staff shortages, such as someone calling in sick, taking a leave of absence or moving to another city. The hospital was constantly trying to cover for these normal shortages.

"There's enough turnover in healthcare that we want to build in redundancy that will take care of these issues 99 percent of the time," Hawkins said. "Ideally, 100 percent of the time, but there are always those situations and circumstances that we are challenged with. It could be a flu epidemic that could affect our employees. Our rules are that if you were to get the flu, they're not supposed to come to work until they're fever free for 24 hours. But if the flu hits five or six nurses in a unit?" It can cripple the unit. "You get to a tipping point, based

on the staffing problems, where everything is lined up and it's going to become unsafe. ... I think Peace Health understands patient safety is important. So once we shared some of that narrative with leadership, it's not been a difficult process to get the improved."

In the past few years, Peace Harbor has doubled its labor and increased staffing models. It has added a clinical educator position who keeps staff trained and up-to-date, doubled labor and delivery staffing and recently made a full-time charge nurse position in the emergency department.

"I would also say that adding the charge nurse position in our ER around the clock is providing more resources for our patients and our other nurses to rely on to help elevate some clinical decision making that needs to be made," Hawkins said. "It frees them up to do more direct patient care. The charge nurse can help arrange for transfers, help to make sure we're getting results back from our labs, radiology and critical patients."

Hawkins also stated that the hospital has been working on competitive benefits and wages, along with newer equipment for staff — "Like a Nexus unit for medication dispensing is more effective and allows them to spend more time with the patient instead of gathering meds. We have just deployed nine new airflow beds to help pressure increase. And our team is getting a new patient monitoring system in January or February. And the reason I say that is, when you're trying to get a model in place to recruit and retain, you want to be able to have competitive wages and benefits. You want to be able to get them a decent work environment, have good staffing plans where they feel safe and they can take care of their patients, and not ask them to work too much overtime because they have families that need to be taken care of."

Peace Harbor has also worked on decreasing readmissions through programs such as Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) and Home Healthcare.

Robin Allen, director of clinical services, said, "I think the communication with the MIH provider is that they

work really closely with home health, so the patients that are being discharged don't fall between the cracks. They make sure that MIH gets out there to make that connection, then follow up with home health. It's a really great system. They're great partners."

The changes have ultimately helped bring down patient wait times.

"I think what you're seeing is our 'left without being seen' rates in the ER are going down," Hawkins said. "Patients that are coming and having to wait are finding they can stay and be seen in around 15-20 minutes. We don't get it right all the time, but we are getting better at it. I'm also seeing us providing better care when they're here. Our readmission rates are declining as well. Our length of care in acute care is declining in certain diagnosis. We're getting meds to them faster the first half day. We're taking care of them and they're being discharged and getting them home sooner. And they're not bouncing back. We're not pushing them out the door too quick. So we're seeing those readmission rates go down too."

But there are still occasional issues. As the hospital works promote within to fill newly created positions, an occasion "perfect storm" can occur that leaves staff short.

"We still have challenges with that," Hawkins said. "We're still working where those baseline models are still fragile."

One example is a recent shortage in Peace Harbor's Intensive Care Unit (ICU), which has led to some patients being transferred to other facilities.

"Normally we have a census of 2 to 3 patients in our ICU," Hawkins said, with the possibility of up to four patients at any given time.

However, two of the charge nurses on the regular medical floor were promoted, which the hospital believed they could cover. Then the unexpected resignation of one nurse, followed by another who had to take leave for personal reasons, left the hospital short on staff in the Medical-Surgical unit. To cover that unit, they had to look at other units they could temporarily cut back on until new nurses were hired. They turned to the ICU, cutting

back on the census of patients that would be allowed. Instead of having up to four patients, they limited it to just one patient at a time.

"We couldn't guarantee that we would have two RNs in there 24/7," Hawkins explained. "We definitely felt comfortable we could have one. Rather than put any of our patients in jeopardy with not enough staff, we're limiting our census."

But by limiting the ICU to just one patient, Peace Harbor had to transfer additional patients to other facilities, such as RiverBend. This is being done by the Western Lane Ambulance District, which in turn has to approve overtime for its ambulance staff to be able to make the transfers.

"We've moved people about half a dozen times," Hawkins said, pointing out that transferring people from a 21-bed facility is not entirely uncommon. "In my time here, we've bumped up at that ceiling maybe one time, usually flu season. But then, the entire region was full. Sometimes you can't find a bed anywhere."

The ICU shortage at Peace Harbor is not the norm and is expected to be alleviated within the next few weeks.

"It takes us two to four weeks to bring in a traveler," Hawkins said, referring to nurses who travel to different cities to fill in positions that are temporarily vacant. "They have to do background checks, get a license sometimes. And get acclimated through our systems. It's really unfair to our patients to kind of drop in a nurse who doesn't know our processes and protocols. That's unsafe too. ... It happens across the industry. You might find a 500-bed hospital that may say they're full. But when you look at it, a particular unit may be closed down entirely because there's just not enough staff. We don't particularly do that here. It's happened a couple of times, you get close, and then you get covered. We try and get travelers from other parts of the Oregon network. Unfortunately, we had to make this decision in this case."

As for hiring a more permanent employee, the process can take longer, anywhere from four to 12 weeks.

"That's just the reality of it," Hawkins said. "Our turnover is a little less than the state av-

erage. People who come here really want to be here, and that's a really neat thing."

But finding people can be difficult. First, there is a national shortage of healthcare workers, both in providers and nurses.

"I think we've been able to influence a lot of those things, with the exception of workforce housing. That, I think, is important to share," Hawkins said. "Florence is a beautiful place. As a caregiver, you want to work either urban or rural. And then you make that decision, and decide where you want to work that's a smaller community. I think Florence is a great solution for that, and I believe in that. But the housing component for rural communities is pretty challenging. We're always, as a team, trying to find housing for new caregivers and there's some great stories. Recently, one of our caregivers helped out another caregiver and their family who was recently hired."

Allen explained, "They were living in a hotel for two weeks. We were able to find them a place to live, but it was very difficult for them to, on their own, find a place."

Another problem is the overall lack of employment in the area. While a nurse can be employed at the hospital, their spouse may have difficulty finding steady work.

"Sometimes in rural areas, it's the spouse. One spouse is a nurse, the other is a school teacher. That might work out nice. We've had people apply where the spouse is an electrical engineer, or a marine biologist. Some of those jobs are nearby, but not right here. Sometimes those are challenges for us," Hawkins said. "It's an imperfect system that we're trying to make the

best of. I think if a healthcare worker wants to work somewhere rural in a great community, I think Florence is a great spot. I really do."

Davidson pointed out that the benefits of working as a nurse in a rural area can outweigh those in working in a metropolitan area.

"I feel like the one-on-one patient care really helps because you get to know your patient better than most hospitals. With bigger hospitals, I always hear seasoned nurses say that it's hard to get the one-on-one patient care that they see here. And that keeps a lot of nurses here, the chance to get to know your patients better. I couldn't imagine being busy, busy, busy and not having the chance to really sit down and say, 'How are you?' and get to know not only what's going on in the hospital, but what's going on outside of the hospital."

"I feel like that's a good reason why nurses want to stay here. I feel the more nurses we have come in, the more nurses we'll have stay and the staffing issue won't be in existence."

By mid-August, Hawkins expects the Medical Surgical Unit to be fully staffed again and the ICU can go back to normal levels, though those levels are expected to change as the community grows.

"We're a reflection of the community," Hawkins said. "As the community needs change, I think that as more Baby Boomers come in who will need services, our need for primary care providers and our need for additional lab and radiology will increase, and we'll continue to grow. And we'll keep an eye on that. It's a gradual growth."

For more information, visit www.peacehealth.org.

Let me Showcase your property.



Jan Jagoe
Broker

541 999-0879



1749 Highway 101 • 541-997-1200



89310 Leverage Dr – Enjoy this 3 bdrm, 2 bath home with vaulted ceilings, separate living and family rooms, and sunroom to the large backyard. Kitchen with cook island, double oven and pantry. Master bath has custom shower and heated floors. \$359,000. #2901-18621943



Support Your Community

By Supporting Local Businesses



www.shoppelocal.biz

ART ALLIANCE

Florence Regional Arts Alliance
120 Maple Street
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-999-0859

AUTOMOTIVE

Hoberg's Complete Auto Repair
345 Hwy. 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-2413

Petersen Auto Detailing
Florence, Oregon, 97439
541-999-6078

CHAMBER

Florence Area Chamber of Commerce
290 Hwy 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-3128
www.florencechamber.com

CHARITABLE GIVING

Salvation Army - Western Lane County
PO Box 1041
Florence Or 97439
1-800-481-3280

CHURCH

Cross Road Assembly of God
1380 10th St
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-3533

Florence Church of Christ
1833 Tamarack St.
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-3133

DENTURIST

Denture Services
524 Laurel Street
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-6054

ESTATE SALES

Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales
498 Hwy. 101
Florence OR 97439
541-999-0126
www.CindyWobbeEstates.com

EVENT CENTER

Florence Events Center
715 Quince Street
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-1994

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Edward Jones-Andy Baber, AAMS
Financial Advisor
1010 Highway 101
541-997-8755

Oregon Pacific Bank
1355 Highway 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-7121
www.opbc.com

FUNERAL CHAPEL

Burns's Riverside Chapel
2765 Kingwood St.
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-3416

Dunes Memorial Chapel
2300 Frontage Road
Reedsport, Oregon 97467
541-271-2822

GARBAGE & RECYCLING

County Transfer & Recycling
85040 Hwy. 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-8233

HEATING/SHEET METAL

Florence Heating & Sheet Metal
1645 Kingwood St
541-997-2422

HUMANE SOCIETY

Oregon Coast Humane Society
541-997-4277
Shelter
2840 Rhododendron Dr.
Thrift Store
1193 Bay St.

INSURANCE

Abel Insurance Agency
875 Hwy 101
Florence, OR 97439
541-997-3466
www.abelinsuranceagency.com

NEWSPAPERS

Siuslaw News
148 Maple Street
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-3441
www.thesiuslawnews.com

PEST CONTROL

Swanson's Pest Management
1550 15th St #14
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-4027

PET GROOMING/BOARDING

Aloha Pet Grooming
1751 12th Street
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-2726

REAL ESTATE

Coldwell Banker Coast Real Estate
Lynnette Wikstrom, Broker
100 Hwy 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-999-0786

West Coast Real Estate Services, Inc.
1870 Hwy. 126, Suite A
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-SOLD (7653)

REC. VEHICLES SERV. & REPAIR

Florence RV & Automotive Specialists
4390 Hwy 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-8287
www.FlorenceRV.com

RESTAURANT

1285 Restobar
1285 Bay St, Florence, Oregon 97439
(541) 902-8338

RETIREMENT LIVING

The Shorewood
1451 Spruce St.
Florence, Oregon 97439
(541) 997-8202
shorewoodsl.com

SEAFOOD

Krab Kettle
270 Hwy 101
Florence, Oregon 97439
541-997-8996

SEPTIC SERVICE

Wally's Septic Tank Pumping Inc.
541-997-8885

TIRES

Les Schwab Tire Center
4325 Highway 101
Florence, Oregon, 97439
(541) 997-7178



shoppe
Keep it local.