

Good Shepherd adds doctors, acquires Gifford Medical Center

Rural areas struggle to attract primary care providers

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Good Shepherd Medical Center is acquiring the longtime Hermiston practice Gifford Medical Center.

It will add three doctors and three nurse practitioners, increasing its total count to 11 primary care providers.

But Hermiston continues to see a need for health care providers, a problem it shares with many rural communities.

"One challenge we face here is recruiting," said Nick Bejarano, Good Shepherd's director of marketing and communications.

Bejarano said this year Good Shepherd conducted a phone survey and focus groups with 486 community members. It found a real desire from residents for more primary care providers in the area.

Attracting medical professionals to rural areas has long been a challenge, said Dr. Doug Flaiz of Family Health Associates. That practice has eight primary

care providers. Flaiz said he is starting his 43rd year there.

"I enjoy working here," he said. "I've done a lot of recruiting over the years, with some success and some failure. At times it's very difficult."

Flaiz said one thing that's frustrated him is that graduates at the nearest medical schools, Oregon Health and Sciences University, don't seem to want to work in rural Oregon.

"It's disappointing to me that OHSU has had less than a handful of grads come here in the time I've worked here," he said. "They seem to want to practice within five miles of (Interstate) 5."

Bejarano said once doctors arrive in Hermiston it's easier to get them to stay, but they compete with bigger medical groups that can offer a more flexible schedule and work-life balance.

He said while Good Shepherd is fairly small, that sometimes help with the recruiting process. And he hopes combining Gifford with Good Shepherd will right-size the search for some applicants.

"The plan with Gifford is to expand upon the legacy they have of excellent care," he said. "Many physicians want to work for a group — it's more like working for an employer versus starting your own business."

Judith Mitchell, a physician assistant at the Hermiston Urgent Care clinic, said there are certain health issues specific to rural areas, especially those where agriculture is an economic driver.

She said many of the patients they see in rural areas tend to put off care because they don't have time, or feel they should be doing other things.

"So we have to figure out how to make it work for them," she said. "We have patients that haven't been seen in 20 years, so you're getting hypertension, diabetes, eyes and feet problems. When you live in urban areas with a lot of access, people are more aware of their health and what they should be doing."

She added that part of her job as a provider in a rural community is making medicine work for those who haven't always had access to care. "We're picking up a lot of people that have fallen through the cracks," she said.

Mitchell said it's common for providers to travel from hub cities to rural areas, instead of living there. She lives south of Portland and travels to and from Hermiston twice a week. Mitchell said she has been commuting to her job in Hermiston for about three

years and loves the job, but has no plan to move closer.

"It kind of depends on each person's preference," she said. "It depends on what you're looking for. If you're a brand-new PA and you're looking to get your foot in the door, you may like it and decide to stay. But you may be a person who may want to work with the 'big dogs,' and then you have to go to the cities."

She added that the decision can be financially-driven, as well.

"Sometimes in big cities, companies can offer larger financial packages to providers, and rural communities can't compete," she said. "When you're facing \$150,000 to \$200,000 of student loans, that has a tendency to factor in."

Hermiston has an urgent care clinic, which has three primary care practitioners, and Mirasol Family Health Center, which has nine. The Morrow County Health District also has clinics in some of its communities, Bejarano said. He said Good Shepherd sees patients from all over the county, as well as Morrow, and even as far away as Arlington. Dennis Burke, the president of Good Shepherd, said he hopes to expand Gifford Medical Center's urgent care from six days to seven and expand hours.

Local grad promoted in national wheat group

HERMISTON HERALD

A Hermiston native is among those recently promoted at the U.S. Wheat Associates.

Amanda Spoo, a 2009 Hermiston High School graduate, has been promoted to assistant director of communications for the national organization.

Spoo joined U.S. Wheat Associates in October 2014, after two years as director of communications at Kansas Pork Association. At U.S. Wheat Associates, she manages social media outreach, and communicates with stakeholders and overseas customers.

"I knew I wanted to do something with agriculture," Spoo said. "We didn't have a farm, but I grew up around agriculture, and knowing there were other careers in ag besides just farming."

Her father Tom Spoo, now Hermiston High School's principal, used



Amanda Spoo

to be the school's Ag Science teacher. Amanda said while participating in the school's Future Farmers of America, she realized she wanted to do something with communications.

"I've always loved to write, and am interested in current issues," she said. "That kind of married with ag communications."

U.S. Wheat Associates promotes American-grown wheat to international markets.

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Edward Jones wins award for client innovation

The financial services firm Edward Jones won the technology category for large broker/dealers at the 2016 WealthManagement.com Industry Awards.

The award recognized Edward Jones for being the first large financial services firm to introduce two-

way texting with clients that meets industry regulations, a challenge some in the industry assumed insurmountable. The organization introduced two-way texting in late 2015. After clients verify their phone number and opt in to their preferred services,

they can begin texting with Edward Jones, receive alerts and get appointment reminders on their cell phones. Nearly half of financial advisors now have texted with clients, with all communications archived and monitored for compliance purposes.

"This is something our clients, especially younger clients, want," said Kacie Levy of Hermiston.

There are several Edward Jones financial advisors in Hermiston and Pendleton. To learn more, visit www.edwardjones.com.

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