

St. Luke's, Aspirus complete process of affiliations

DULUTH, Minn. — St. Luke's health system of Duluth announced Friday the completion of its move to affiliate with Wausau, Wis.-based Aspirus Health.

The expanded health system now operates 19 hospitals and 130 outpatient locations with nearly 14,000 team members, including 1,300 employed physicians and advanced practice clinicians across northeastern Minnesota, northern and central Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, said a release, adding the system will operate headquarters in Wausau and maintain a corporate office in Duluth.

"The combined system will collaborate in clinical care, sharing medical knowledge and resources to improve care coordination and increase patient access for a broad region. This will improve patient outcomes,

provide more cost-effective services and advance the overall quality of health care," said the release.

"We are proud to welcome St. Luke's (hospital) and Lake View (clinic) to the Aspirus family," said Matt Heywood, Aspirus Health President and CEO. "Our collective strengths will improve health for our communities, and we look forward to what the future holds for our patients, staff and all who rely on our system for excellent care. Our combined team can now begin working together as champions for the future of health in our communities."

"Today is a historic day," said Nicholas Van Deelen, MD, St. Luke's co-president. "From our founding in 1881, St. Luke's has built a legacy as a patient-focused organization above all else. We are proud to join Aspirus Health to advance ser-

vices and access in our region. Our like-minded cultures and values are rooted in serving people. The completion of our affiliation will benefit our employees, partners and the communities we serve for generations to come."

"We see our affiliation with Aspirus Health as a continuation of our mission and passion to care for our patients and communities," said Eric Lohn, St. Luke's co-president. "Together, we are stronger, and we will grow and transform to meet the changing needs of our communities. We thank all those involved in making this affiliation a reality."

"Both Aspirus and St. Luke's have worked diligently since announcing a letter of intent to affiliate last summer, including signing a definitive agreement, completing due diligence and participating in a public forum with the Minnesota Attorney General's office in Duluth last

fall," said the release. "The affiliation has satisfied all necessary governmental notices, waiting periods and approvals, and completed the Minnesota Attorney General's review process."

"We appreciate the support this affiliation received from all officials involved," Heywood said.

Heywood will continue to serve as president and CEO of Aspirus Health, and Van Deelen and Lohn will continue to serve as co-presidents of St. Luke's.

As part of the affiliation, according to the release, Aspirus commits to:

- Honor all physician, labor and union contracts.

- Invest at least \$300 million over eight years to fund St. Luke's strategic projects.

- Implement the Epic electronic medical record platform and other standard systems to promote integration and efficiency

within 24 months.

—Expand Aspirus Health Plan into St. Luke's service area within two years, subject to regulatory constraints and timelines, to promote coordinated, cost-efficient and effective delivery of health care services to its members.

"Patient care and services will continue as usual. Patients can continue seeing their current providers to receive the high-quality, compassionate care they always have," Van Deelen said. "The clinic locations, phone numbers and how you interact with us on a day-to-day basis will not change. As we make enhancements over the coming months, we will keep our patients and communities informed."

"Together, St. Luke's and Aspirus will be an innovative, forward-looking system that will transform to meet the health needs of the changing region," said the release.