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Valley Health named one of nation's top health systems

By MICKEY POWELL The Winchester Star

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President and CEO Mark Nantz shows the award that Winchester-based Valley Health received for being recognized as one of the top 15 health systems in the nation.

Provided photo

Winchester-based Valley Health has been named one of the Top 15 local and regional health systems in the nation for 2026.

The honor was recently bestowed by Modern Healthcare, an industry trade magazine. It was based on a quantitative analysis of publicly reported data from 336 health systems by Premier Inc., a North Carolina firm focused on using technology to improve healthcare and lower costs.

"It's like winning an Oscar" in the movie industry, said Kelly Menk, Valley Health's corporate communications manager.

This is the first time the local system has received the award, Valley Health President and CEO Mark Nantz noted.

Health systems can't apply for it, "buy it" or do anything to increase their chances of winning it, he said — they can only strive for it.

Valley Health operates Winchester Medical Center and five other hospitals in the Northern Shenandoah Valley and Eastern West Virginia. It also operates more than 70 medical practices, urgent care centers and outpatient rehabilitation clinics in the region, plus medical transport, long-term care and home health services.

The award is centered around its hospitals' operations, according to Nantz.

Premier's annual study evaluates health systems' performances based on clinical outcomes, patient experiences and operational efficiencies within hospitals.

Among the 15 systems honored, five each are within the categories of small, medium-sized and large systems.

Health systems were grouped into categories based on their total operating expenses, number of member hospitals and number of states in which those hospitals operate, according to Steve Eck, senior content strategist for Modern Healthcare.

Valley Health was included in the small systems category.

The 2026 study found that, compared to their peers, the 15 systems honored saw significant reductions overall in inpatient mortality, infections stemming from patient care and the lengths of patient stays.

Information on how Valley Health fares specifically wasn't detailed.

Yet based on the analysis, Nantz said, "the bottom line is we're just providing better care" at Valley Health than many other health systems.

He mostly attributed that to efforts to make employees feel valued and respected.

"If you take care of your people," Nantz said, " ... they're going to do good work."

Previously, Newsweek magazine recognized Valley Health as being among America's Greatest Workplaces for Health Care and America's Greatest Workplaces for Mental Well-Being.

Forbes magazine has recognized the health system as being among America's Best Employers for Healthcare Professionals.

Valley Health announced in April it will terminate contracts with the two firms that currently manage its doctors, Emergency Medicine of Blue Ridge (EMBR) and Sound Physicians. Another company, SCP Health, will manage emergency department physicians beginning Sept. 30. SCP will take over managing doctors who care for inpatients at the start of next year.

Officials have said those changes stem from cost-saving measures imposed amid expectations of losing \$80 million annually in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements.

In terms of the quality of health care, "I expect them (SCP) to improve on what we're doing now," Nantz said.

He said he hopes Valley Health makes the Top 15 Health Systems list again in 2027.

"We're going to keep doing what we're doing," said Nantz.

In the meantime, "we're going to celebrate quite a bit," he said.

Plans include installing banners recognizing this year's award on Valley Health's six hospital campuses, he mentioned.

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