

CEO Javier Hernandez-Lichtl counts the days to opening...

The clock is counting down to opening day at Baptist Health South Florida's new \$200 million hospital in West Kendall.

It's the first new hospital in Miami-Dade in decades and thousands of local residents had called for the hospital for years, said CEO Javier Hernandez-Lichtl.

Mr. Hernandez-Lichtl, a lifelong Baptist employee who has spent time in its corporate offices and at the helm of its other hospitals, was tapped to lead the facility and is now in charge of getting the hospital up and running, recruiting about 500 physicians and hiring about 1,000 staff.

When this interview was conducted Jan. 27, the hospital was exactly 90 days from opening, though still under hard-hat construction. In between running between meetings and ensuring that all aspects of the facility are accredited with the appropriate agencies, Mr. Hernandez-Lichtl said he's focusing on the hospital's strategic goal of providing emergency care to the surrounding area. The hospital also hopes to provide primary care, which many experts argue is severely lacking nationwide, and obstetrics.

"Within a short time of opening the hospital we anticipate seeing about 40,000 visits per year in our emergency room," he said.

The West Kendall hospital is Baptist's first academic hospital and has closely partnered with Florida International University's recently established medical school. In addition to hosting medical students, Baptist will extend a handful of opportunities to new doctors in an effort to keep locally trained, primary care physicians in the community.

Mr. Hernandez-Lichtl discussed the "Herculean" task of bringing a new hospital online and what'll happen in its first years with Miami Today staff writer Zachary S. Fagenson.

Q: What's your background in hospital administration?

A: I've been working in hospitals since I was 19. I started out volunteering at Children's Hospital in New Orleans, and that's where my passion for working in a hospital began.

My career [started] as a respiratory therapist but went straight into management. At the age of 21 I was managing people. By 25 I went back to graduate school, did my master's in public health administration and came to Baptist Hospital to do a one-year administrative residency. I've been with Baptist 23 years.

Q: What positions did you hold before becoming CEO of this hospital?

A: My first position in Baptist Health, back then Baptist Hospital, was an administrative resident under the leadership of Brian Keeley, who at the time was CEO.

My second position was director of imaging services, followed by assistant vice president and then vice president of professional services. The first 10 years were at Baptist Hospital. I moved to our corporate offices for another 10 years and then the last three as CEO of South Miami Hospital.

Q: What's the process of opening a new hospital?

A: It's a Herculean task. It takes a village, and I am blessed to have a tremendous team at West Kendall Baptist and the



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

"Within a short time of opening the hospital we anticipate seeing about 40,000 visits per year in our emergency room": West Kendall Baptist CEO Javier Hernandez-Lichtl.

The Achiever

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support of my colleagues and 14,000 other employees throughout Baptist Health that are supporting a brand new hospital.

The last hospital opened in Miami-Dade County over 35 years ago. There's no textbook that you can open up and say, 'This is how you open a hospital.' Some things have been easy, other things have been a challenge, but overall we're doing a phenomenal job.

Q: Which agencies are you working with as the project develops?

A: We're dealing mostly [with the] county and state. We'll be going through joint commission accreditation prior to and after opening the hospital, and several departments require their own accreditation and survey.

Q: What is an average day like for you?

A: No two days are alike. I'm running from meeting to meeting, troubleshooting and setting the strategic direction for the hospital.

If I were to put it in order, it's getting the executive [and] leadership team ready for West Kendall Baptist, formatting the close

to 1,000 employees that we will hire, and preparing for the medical staff, the great men and women that are part of other Baptist Health Hospitals that are going to join us to support this community.

Q: What are your long-term goals?

A: Our overall strategic plan is to serve the West Kendall community. This community has been tremendous as far as welcoming Baptist Health, and that's how it all started.

Many years ago the community reached out to Baptist Health, saying, 'We need health care in West Kendall.' That is our vision – being a great provider, a great partner and a great neighbor.

Q: How many patients do you expect to serve on an annual basis?

A: We're going to be busy. One of the major drivers for the hospital is going to be the emergency room. Within a short time of opening the hospital we anticipate seeing about 40,000 visits per year in our emergency room.

Another driver is going to be our obstetric department. West Kendall is a relatively young community, and a lot of babies are born in this area.

The third one is Baptist, in conjunction with FIU, is working on bringing primary care back to South Florida. We have a huge commitment on primary care.

Q: What's the status of construction, and how long until doors open?

A: Today is a monumental day because we're 90 days from opening. We anticipate opening the hospital April 27.

The hospital is practically finished. We're working on minor details, and once we receive that temporary [certificate of occupancy] the leadership will be moving in with the employees that have already been hired.

Q: What's the total budget for this hospital?

A: The budget for the hospital has been over \$200 million.

The facility is LEED certified from a design and construction standpoint, and it's built to withstand category five hurricanes. State-of-the-art technology is what Baptist Health has given to this community. We're fortunate to have the support and the strength that Baptist Health brings.

Q: How's is it being financed?

A: This is all Baptist.

Q: The hospital's Web site says you're recruiting physicians. How many do you have so far, and where do they all come from?

A: Approximately 500 physicians are being recruited to work at West Kendall Baptist. These are not employed physicians but physicians that are part of our community. The majority of them already work at Baptist Health facilities, either Baptist, South Miami Doctors, Homestead.

Many have shown interest in coming to West Kendall because they are either taking care of those patients right now or they see it as a great economic impact on their offices.

Q: What's the vetting process like in partnering with physicians?

A: There's a detailed process for credentialing physicians in every hospital. That process is rigorous. It takes several months. We verify all credentials and licenses and do criminal background checks.

Q: Physicians aside, how many overall hires do you expect to make?

A: Approximately 1,000 people will be working in this hospital, not necessarily on day one, but we're starting with several hundred nurses. That's the backbone of the hospital.

Right now we're recruiting [some] 30 security guards and 40 environmental care workers.

Q: Have you found a local supply of workers or are you going out of market?

A: Being a Fortune 100-recognized organization, people recognize the value of working for Baptist Health.

At the same time, Baptist Health gives a lot of opportunities for employees that are part of the system already. Approximately 50% of the people that we have extended offers to are employees within Baptist Health.

The vast majority are people that are in the South Florida region, but we have recruited out of state for some hard-to-recruit leadership positions. Our director of surgical services came to us from California.

Q: Has Baptist been affected by the national nurse shortage?

A: There is not only a national but an international shortage of nurses. The economy has helped because nurses that were working part time are now working full time. Some that were anticipating retirement haven't retired.

We're fortunate because of our great reputation and because we've been proactive. We have scholarship programs. We work with various universities. We fund students to go to school to become nurses, giving Baptist Health a two-year commitment to work for us.

We have not had difficulties in getting nurses for West Kendall Baptist. It's being ahead of the curve and not reacting.

Q: Will the hospital be implementing cost-saving technologies?

A: This hospital is well-poised for any future health care reform. From a design and facility standpoint, it's a tight, efficiently designed hospital, so we're going to see cost savings in the future.

The staffing models we're putting in place are sharing space and minimizing the silo mentality that occurs in many other organizations.

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This is a start up, so we're not bringing any baggage, any philosophies into it. It's a fresh start. [We're] partnering with our physician partners on being creative, being efficient and applying evidence-based medicine [to] everything we do.

Q: What have you heard from physician partners looking to work with Baptist?

A: Great physician partners have stepped up to the plate, are dedicated to this community, love working with Baptist Health and are ready to be part of this incredible team.

Q: Will there be an opportunity to upgrade technology, such as implementing electronic medical records?

A: Absolutely. Those things are being executed and launched across Baptist Health.

Q: What will be the hospital's focus areas?

A: The major area focus is going to be primary care.

We're going to be an academic organization, partnering with FIU on a graduate medical education family residency program. Our commitment, along with FIU, [is] to bring primary care back to South Florida.

We're going to have a focus on wellness, a focus on maternity, a focus on being here for the community when they need us through our emergency department.

Q: Will the hospital have specialty departments?

A: For the first year we're going to focus on primary care, emergency medicine and obstetrics. After that we'll see what the community [needs] and develop those centers.

Q: Do you have an idea of what the ratio is going to be between primary care physicians and specialists?

A: I don't have a ratio for you now. We're putting all the pieces in place to develop and grow.

Two years after the hospital opens we anticipate [having] a primary care clinic adjacent to the hospital and an opportunity for family medicine residents to rotate through that clinic.

Q: How will the hospital promote primary care to the community and ensure people take advantage of it rather than going to the emergency room?

A: It's going to be us, launching some campaign to educate the community to be proactive rather than reactive and focusing on wellness.

By having this clinic attached to the hospital I'm hoping we will be able to minimize the number of admissions to the hospital. By having a second option, you might be able to get discharged and followed in this primary care clinic, rather than being admitted to the hospital—keeping health care costs down and doing the right thing for the community.

Q: You mentioned that the hospital will function as an academic center. Is this Baptist's first?

A: Yes.

Q: What does that entail?

A: What makes West Kendall Baptist unique is that we're going to have a graduate medical education program, focusing on primary care residents, which we don't have in other Baptist Health facilities.

Baptist Health has made the decision that West Kendall Baptist is going to be its academic center. FIU medical students will be rotating through West Kendall, but not exclusive to our hospital. They will also be rotating through other Baptist Health hospitals.

Q: How many medical students do you expect to rotate through the system?

A: FIU had 42 students in their first class. They had in the low 40s in their second class. It ramps up for the next two years, up to 80 and then about 120 afterwards.

There are several hospitals throughout South Florida that those students rotate [through], not just Baptist Health hospitals. They will have an opportunity to do their clinical site rotations there. West Kendall will be one of those facilities.

Q: In addition to being CEO of this hospital, you're also Baptist Health System's academic liaison. What are you doing in that capacity?

A: As chief academic affiliation officer for Baptist Health my role is to work not only with FIU but any other medical school that we might partner with. Right now FIU is our partner, and we have a great working relationship with them.

Q: How do you expect the hospital's relationship with FIU to grow on a long-term basis?

A: FIU has been a great partner to work with. As their medical school grows, we'll be growing with them. I have an appointment at the medical school as associate dean of academic affairs.

Q: You mentioned there might be an opportunity to work with other medical schools. Are other partnerships in the works?

A: No. FIU is the medical school that we have an affiliation with.

Q: Are you teaching any classes?

A: No, just making sure that we orchestrate clinical rotations for all the students. We have over 100 Baptist Health physicians that have already received voluntary appointments at FIU.

Q: Looking forward, what advice would you give the next generation of health care administrators?

A: Flexibility is the name of the game. This industry is changing so rapidly. Learn as much as possible, benchmark and look for best practices, and apply it tomorrow.

Q: How do you balance between your different responsibilities at Baptist, and where do you see yourself spending the majority of your time in coming years?

A: The vast majority of my time is running West Kendall Baptist Hospital. That's my No. 1 focus right now—getting the hospital up and running, making sure that it's a success story for the West Kendall community and Baptist Health.

Second is making sure that the Baptist and FIU partnership grows stronger. It's too early to define. It's a new opportunity from both sides, but [we're] working to develop that partnership so that it gives medical students a great clinical opportunity to learn and become residents at West Kendall Baptist and stay in this community.

Q: How do you plan to ensure that

the talent that trains here stays here?

A: One of the tools is making a huge investment in the graduate medical education program. Not every hospital is making that investment.

We're starting with four slots, hoping to go to 12 slots within a few years. We recognize how hard it is to attract and retain primary care physicians, and this is Baptist Health's commitment to the South Florida community.

Q: Looking ahead, may competitive compensation attract doctors to other parts of the country, and how do you plan to deal with this?

A: It's very tough to be a primary care physician anywhere in the United States. We need to work collectively so that we're all aligned and delivering the most efficient, evidence-based medicine that the community needs.

Q: Do you have any hobbies?

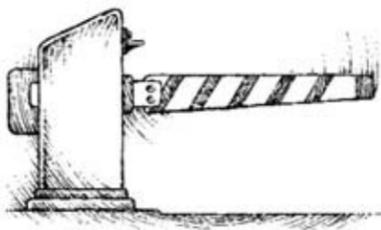
A: I have a 10-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter, so I spend a lot of time with the kids. My son's involved with soccer, Cub Scouts and robotics in school. My little girl is involved with ballet. Following the two kids around is another full-time job.

Q: Are you involved with any non-profit or cultural organizations?

A: One thing that I've learned from Brian Keeley and my colleagues at Baptist Health is not just focusing on the work that we do, but also giving back to this community. I learned that lesson very early in my career in Baptist Health and I pride myself in giving back to this community.

Throughout the years I've sat on several boards—United Way board, Stars [of] Hope board. Most recently and prior to that I also used to sit on the FIU's Honors College board. Most recently I chaired the Miami International University Art Institute board.

I'm also the incoming chair for the Florida Sterling Council, which is Florida's version of the Malcolm Baldrige [National Quality] Award. I also sit on the Florida Patient Safety Corporation and alumni of Leadership Florida.



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