

A Message from the Board of Commissioners Regarding the Future of OB Care at KVH

Early today KVH received a resignation letter from KVH Women's Health provider Holly Dawson, DO effective October 12, 2023. In true accordance with our value of Transparency, we want to take this opportunity to be open and honest with you on the current status, and future plans of KVH Women's Health and the KVH Family Birthing Place.

At KVH, we talk a lot about our strategies and how they shape the work we do. When you look at the KVH strategies, Access is at the top of the list. For us, Access means that KVH is intentional in providing the needed services in our community and we work to anticipate the resources needed to serve our community.

In April 2022, the Women's Health Clinic was staffed with four OB/GYN or FPOB physicians and two advanced practice providers. These staff shared the responsibility of OB/GYN care at KVH Women's Health and OB call and deliveries at KVH Hospital. KVH providers were supported by staff at Community Health of Central Washington (CHCW), however their call coverage has been significantly hampered due to their own staffing issues. Since then, three physicians and one advanced practice provider have left the practice for issues around work-life balance and professional burnout. We have been actively recruiting OB/GYN and FPOB candidates since the fall of 2022 and have seen some success with the arrivals of Dr. Wageneck and Anna Phillips.

We are very proud of our Women's Health teams in the clinic and the hospital and we want to support them. As KVH Women's Health began to experience the provider departures felt throughout the country, leadership began exploring new options to support this service. The key to any service line offered is that it must be RELIABLE for our community and SUSTAINABLE for our providers and staff. Women's health has faced unprecedented challenges in 2023 and we are committed to addressing them. Due to staff shortages, we have been forced to limit the number of new OB and GYN patients we can accept. We've had to reach into our Family Medicine providers to assist with newborn call coverage. We can no longer depend on the traditional model of single clinic physician coverage and must think deeper and broader.

Eight months ago, leadership brought forth a new model of obstetrics care for our KVH provider team to consider. This model is similar to the models we are using in MedSurg/CCU, the Emergency Department, and Anesthesia where dedicated, professional teams with significant bench strength are brought in to provide services for our patients in our facility. At that time, our providers felt they could still meet the needs of our community and asked that we continue to put our efforts into recruiting new KVH-employed providers. This has not worked. Today, our providers are leaving for opportunities to work in the very models we were bringing forward.

Across the state and throughout the country OB programs are closing. We only expect to see this trend continue. We know that rural OB programs are fragile everywhere. **KVH is committed to finding a reliable and sustainable OB program for our community and welcomes the involvement of our community partners.** We will be holding a special board meeting on Thursday, July 20 at 5:00 p.m. to discuss our efforts and next steps. In the meantime, please be assured that we are committed to a full-service women's health program at Kittitas Valley Healthcare.

Matt Altman
President, KVH Board of Commissioners