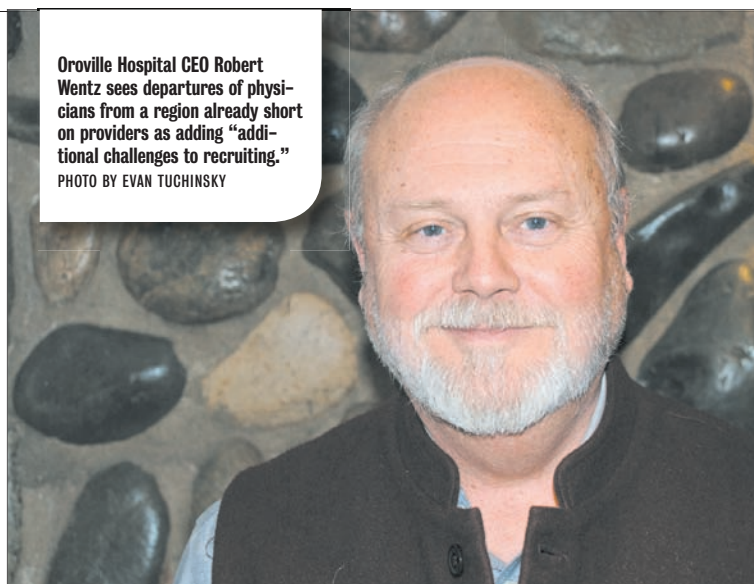


Oroville Hospital CEO Robert Wentz sees departures of physicians from a region already short on providers as adding "additional challenges to recruiting."

PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY



"Since across the nation there's a [doctor] shortage, they can move anywhere they choose," he added. "Even if we could retain them, for some of these services, you have to be close by a hospital either for [being on] call or to handle their patients."

That was the case with Chobanov. She said she never thought of leaving the area—she didn't want to uproot her children, and with her house standing, she didn't face the dilemma of whether to rebuild. The offer from Oroville Hospital meant she still could care for her current patients after a minimal transition. She rotates between two offices: Dove's Landing Neurology, on Oro Dam Boulevard, and Oroville Hospital Neurology, on the main campus.

"I really don't like changes," she said, laughing softly. "Whether it was Oroville, whether it was any other location, I couldn't be spared ... but I'm surrounded by a great group of people that made it easier."

## Room to grow

Dr. Lynne Pappas doesn't live in the burn zone and didn't lose her office to the fire. Her psychiatry practice—for children, adolescents and adults, from as far away as Yreka—resided in the Feather River Health Center.

Still, Nov. 8 and the days that followed proved trying. After almost 11 years in Paradise, and 16 years prior working around the North State, she has a large pool of patients. Pappas also was part of a team, working with therapists and other psychiatrists at Adventist

Health Feather River.

They had many patients in crisis, amid a crisis. With their building closed, the team turned a Chico Starbucks into their command center. Each morning, they'd meet, formulate an action plan, then disperse to homes, shelters and camps to give care. Cellphones and computers kept everyone connected.

"It was a series of very long days—20-hour days sometimes—of being on the phone, contacting all patients, trying to find them ... reaching out to make sure they were OK," Pappas said. "We were doing what we could to facilitate whatever we could for their needs, because in the moment obviously it was just mayhem."

"But more than anything, I think the people that we work with, we were a grounding for them, and so it was a blessing for everyone."

She secured space in a church through the end of December, when the Feather River Health Center reopened. She came back to find cramped quarters.

Pappas no longer had her allotment of rooms in which to see patients. Because her case load is so full and varied, she requires two; with added providers to accommodate, Feather River would spare only one.

"I needed to find a facility with a space to work where I could continue seeing all of my patients," Pappas said. "Oroville Hospital had reached out to me at that time and was wanting to embrace that, provide whatever space I needed to continue practicing and to build the practice."

She, like Chobanov, started Feb. 1. The hospital set her up in a

facility by Highway 70, the Mental Well-Being Clinic, with three therapists. Pappas brought along Jacquie Lynn Donadio, her psychiatric nurse the past 12 years.

"When I came on with my nurse specialist, the idea was to grow the department," Pappas said. Among the initiatives: consultations for hospital patients "who are suffering and have psychiatric needs."

She added: "The hope is to continue growing through recruitment ... because the need is obviously so great."

## What's ahead?

The future of health care in Paradise is like the future of the town itself. Much will depend on how many residents return and the extent to which their community rebuilds.

"Nobody will know for years," Haynes said. "As we get farther away from the event, we will understand more. But I think it will take two years to understand what the new norm is."

With communities co-mingled—Chico, Oroville and Gridley housing fire refugees and providing services, including health care—Haynes noted a ripple effect. Long-term, might the population decrease from those choosing to move away, instead of rebuild, offset the loss of providers? Haynes considers that a possibility.

Wentz isn't convinced. He asserted that the loss of physicians from the Ridge "has an effect on the entire region"—already facing a provider shortage, "this obviously didn't make that better. It just adds some additional challenges to recruiting, to assure we have the right number of physicians to care for the people. And we will take care of them."

Pappas said her professional move to Oroville is permanent. Chobanov said the same thing. A full-service hospital in Paradise won't bring them back.

"I really loved my prior position, and the hospital," Chobanov said. "I had a perfect 6 1/2 years there. I really enjoyed it very much."

"However, realistically, I don't see it coming back as it was—at least in the near future. And I cannot sit in two chairs at the same time. I have to take care of my professional life, my patients, my family. So, I'm here for good." □

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