

An open letter to our patients and communities

DEAR NEIGHBOR,

At University of Maryland Shore Regional Health, our mission is steadfast: **Creating Healthier Communities Together**. This mission reflects our commitment to building partnerships and caring for our communities where we live and work, both within and outside our hospitals. I have devoted my entire career to healthcare, most recently the past 10 years here on the Eastern Shore, and I can say with the deepest sincerity that I am truly grateful to be able to serve this incredible region. Often, we see members of our community when they are at their most vulnerable, and we find strength and purpose in those moments.

Of course, **this past year has been particularly trying**. COVID-19 has tested our resolve and challenged our spirit. **With the backing of the entire University of Maryland Medical System, our team members at Shore Regional Health have risen to this unprecedented challenge**. We have cared for nearly one thousand COVID-positive patients, expanded capacity in our hospitals, conducted community testing and partnered with counties to deploy COVID vaccines. Over the course of this past year, I have had the opportunity to witness compassion, decency, kindness and determination in the faces of our patients, their families and among our team members and I have only the people of the Eastern Shore to thank for this blessing.

The whole of the Eastern Shore has a unique spirit and identity, and Chestertown's distinctive identity is especially strong. For years, the future of UM Shore Medical Center at Chestertown has been a topic of speculation, debate and even frustration. **The questions raised about the future of the hospital are both worthy and appropriate**. As such, I wish to thank the leaders and citizens for their dedication to our hospital.

I am using this letter to affirm, unequivocally, that **we have developed a path forward that keeps the hospital in Chestertown**. As I look ahead, I am also extremely excited about what is possible if we work together toward an even broader goal: a system that supports improved access to care and a healthier community extending beyond the walls of our hospital. It is our responsibility to fulfill this obligation as the healthcare system serving our rural communities.

Our commitment to care for the people of Kent and northern Queen Anne's counties demands that we reimagine how care is delivered, and this means working with our partners, local leaders, government officials and our communities to secure the future for access to care and better health. The first step in this process is to recognize that **UM Shore Medical Center at Chestertown, as a small, rural hospital, should be afforded the opportunities offered to similar rural hospitals across the United States**. Over the past year, Shore's leadership has worked with the State of Maryland to secure these opportunities. Second, we must prioritize care for our most vulnerable populations by offering necessary, high-quality outpatient and home-based health and wellness services. **Caring for our patients beyond our hospital walls, especially the growing number of elderly patients, must be a larger priority**. Finally, we've listened to the community and also to the experts engaged by the State of Maryland in the Rural Health Study.



We know work must be done so patients have access to primary care, the right specialists and the right care, whether in Chestertown, Easton or elsewhere within our University of Maryland Medical System. Transportation, technology and other solutions will be a focus to enhance our capability to deliver on these needs.

As we move forward, I am committed to transparency for how we will secure the future of healthcare in our region. In that spirit, I want to share a few important updates about our next steps, while at the same time asking for your support.

Over the next month, UM Shore Regional Health will refine a plan that defines the future of our rural hospital and offers services that promote the health and wellness of our community. This process will include meetings with our medical staff, team members and board of directors as well as regulators at the State of Maryland. Following their input, **we will present the plan to the community and local leaders this spring, answering your questions and taking in your feedback through town halls and other forums**.

Throughout this process I promise to be honest and forthright about our collective path forward, and in exchange I ask for your patience. We will work to keep you informed as we refine our new models of care and look forward to presenting our ideas to the community, where **I am confident we will earn your support and gain your enthusiasm**.

Until then, **thank you to everyone on the Eastern Shore for your continued support for UM Shore Regional Health**. Your appreciation for our compassionate care and confidence in the heroic work our team does every day on your behalf is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ken Kozel

President and CEO

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