

Tuesday, April 23, 2024

Chestnut Health Systems Names New CEO

Leadership transition scheduled for fall 2025



Dave Sharar, Ph.D.

We're writing to let you know about an upcoming transition in Chestnut's executive leadership.

Dave Sharar, Ph.D., Chestnut's CEO, has decided to step away from CEO responsibilities and to take on a new role at the agency beginning in fall 2025. Dave had previously made the board of directors aware of his decision. Since then, the board has worked through the process of finding his successor.

I am pleased to share with you that Puneet Leekha, J.D., Chestnut's COO and General Counsel, will become the agency's CEO in the fall of 2025.



Puneet Leekha, J.D.

Puneet brings many strengths to the role including numerous contributions to Chestnut's corporate culture, strengthening its external posture, and working to improve the behavioral health field at large.

Internally, Puneet has focused on improving business operations, employee recruitment and retention, workplace wellness, and business strategy. He has overseen initiatives to help make Chestnut an employer of choice. Externally, he has worked hard to strategically position Chestnut as a leader in our field and in the business community. He has cultivated important contacts. Having spent nine years at Chestnut, he thoroughly understands all facets of the agency. He is well positioned to communicate with Chestnut's many stakeholders about who we are, what we do, and where we are headed. He has also proven to be resilient, patient, empathetic, and a sound decision-maker – all traits that a healthy organization needs in its leader. Puneet has an incredible vision for the agency and how to move it forward.

Plans will be announced in the coming months for transitioning Puneet's current roles and responsibilities.

Dave has made countless contributions to Chestnut's success over his 35-year tenure. As CEO for the last almost seven years, he led the agency through periods of significant growth including CCBHC and FQHC additional sites and capacity, service expansion into Missouri and Oregon, a 43 percent increase in revenue, and a 33 percent increase in employee count. He led Chestnut through the COVID pandemic and workforce crisis, which challenged us in every way imaginable. He advocated with State elected and appointed officials for some of the largest increases in Medicaid rates in Illinois history.

Beginning in fall 2025, Dave plans to expand his work as a Research Scientist at Chestnut's research division, Lighthouse Institute – a role he has held on a part-time basis since 2003.

Please join me in congratulating Dave and Puneet!



Laura Haas, Chair, Board of Directors
Chestnut Health Systems