



**American Hospital
Association**

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**James J. Bleicher, M.D., Receives AHA's Shirley Ann Munroe Leadership
Award**

*Finalists from Chadron, Neb., Wagner, S.D., and
Chanute, Kan., Also Recognized*

WASHINGTON (November 20, 2012) – James J. Bleicher, MD, President and CEO of Verde Valley Medical Center (VVMC) in Cottonwood, Ariz., is the 2012 winner of the American Hospital Association's (AHA) Shirley Ann Munroe Leadership Award. The award recognizes the accomplishments of small or rural hospital leaders who have improved health care delivery in their communities through innovative and progressive efforts.

Under Dr. Bleicher's leadership VVMC became involved in numerous efforts to collaborate with community physicians, school districts, and a large academic center to share ideas and research, and improve access. Keenly aware of the needs of the community, he knew the rural areas surrounding VVMC have vulnerable, underserved groups such as Native American and Hispanic populations, uninsured patients, elderly, and those without access to primary care. By teaming up with others, Dr. Bleicher has been able to improve health care delivery and increase patient access in North Central Arizona.

Dr. Bleicher brought cancer treatment to a population that was previously unable to access these vital services locally. He was able to enhance cancer care by entering into a collaborative relationship with The University of Arizona Cancer Center. Dr. Bleicher has incorporated innovations in telemedicine and has used other means of remote communications to bring

programs and services such as access to life-saving research trials and tumor boards led by sub-specialty national experts.

A commitment to quality improvement is another notable trait of Dr. Bleicher. When he began his tenure, VVMC's Hospital Quality Alliance (HQA) measures averaged at 65 percent, and now they have increased to 92 percent. There have been no central line infections in the hospital for three years and no ventilator-assisted pneumonia for four years. In addition, employee engagement has drastically improved since 2009, with Dr. Bleicher implementing the following tagline for the hospital's culture: "One organization working together to provide the highest quality and safest healthcare commensurate with what the community expects and deserves." With this culture in place, the Advisory Board measurements show that VVMC's employee engagement increased from the 18th percentile to the 90th percentile.

Bleicher was appointed President and CEO of Verde Valley Medical Center in 2009. Previously he served as Vice President of Operations and Medical Affairs for VVMC, and he has years of clinical experience as a hospitalist and internist. Dr. Bleicher has spoken at various meetings on culture, most recently at a national provider conference for the Professional Research Associates. He serves on several community boards and coaches youth soccer and baseball.

This year, the Shirley Ann Munroe Leadership Award also recognized three finalists for their significant achievements in service to their community:

- **Bryan Slaba**, CEO of Wagner Community Memorial Hospital – Avera (WCMH-A), a 20-bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH) in Wagner, S.D., has helped build stronger relations with its poverty-ridden and diverse community of 1,600, and has increased efficiency, and quality of care for WCMH-A patients since 2008. Slaba has implemented telemedicine and eCare services which have been invaluable for patient management and safety. He has championed a "Grow Your Own" project to retain local talent and encourage current employees to pursue career advancement opportunities. Additionally, Slaba's community leadership allowed him to coordinate eight local, state, and tribal entities, establishing the Southern Charles Mix County Healthcare Consortium to address

community healthcare needs which currently includes an escalating methamphetamine concern.

- **Harold Krueger, Jr.** has served as CEO of Chadron Community Hospital & Healthcare Services (CCH&HS) in Chadron, Neb. for over 20 years, working to build a technologically enhanced CAH for the people of northwestern Nebraska, eastern Wyoming, southern South Dakota, and the Pine Ridge Native American reservation. Krueger founded the Rural Health Care Association with eight other CAHs and one tertiary care facility to create higher levels of care and communication, and he helped secure an \$18 million FCC grant to install fiber optic high speed cable between the facilities. He has also collaborated with other hospitals to enhance service opportunities available to the community such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and HIV Testing and Counseling, and he has supported a relationship with the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services, Inc. to offer additional services, such as a public dental health clinic, to the underprivileged and uninsured.
- **Dennis Franks** is CEO of Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center (NMRMC) in Chanute, Kan. Since 2006, Franks has transformed NMRMC into the largest employer in the county providing outstanding patient care. NMRMC has faced many challenges with its slow population growth, a tough economy, and increasing healthcare competition, but Franks has continued to invest in education and leadership development for staff and has also joined together with other Kansas hospitals for such initiatives as reducing central line-associated bloodstream infections. He also implemented the Hello Yellow program, a fall reduction program increasing the community's awareness to identify persons at risk of falling which garnered the Kansas Hospital Association Thomas Sipes Challenge Award for its efforts.

Shirley Ann Munroe Award

Shirley Ann Munroe was an advocate for small and rural hospitals and was instrumental in the creation of the AHA's Section for Small or Rural Hospitals, a forum working to support small and rural hospitals as they improve their community's health.

The award is sponsored by the AHA's Section for Small or Rural Hospitals. It is presented

annually to a hospital administrator or chief executive officer who has displayed outstanding leadership in meeting the ongoing challenge of small or rural hospital management. Last year's award recipient was James Dickson, CEO of Copper Queen Community Hospital in Bisbee, Ariz.

About AHA

The American Hospital Association (AHA) is a not-for-profit association of health care provider organizations and individuals that are committed to the health improvement of their communities. The AHA is the national advocate for its members, which includes more than 4,800 hospitals, health care systems, networks, and other providers of care, and 42,000 individuals. Founded in 1898, the AHA provides education for health care leaders and is a source of information on health care issues and trends. For more information, visit the AHA website at www.aha.org.

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