

Chestnut Health Systems Names New CEO

by Christy Germanis

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BLOOMINGTON - The Chestnut Health Systems (Chestnut) board of directors has named a successor for the agency's Chief Executive Officer, who plans to assume new responsibilities with the agency next year.

Puneet Leekha, J.D., Chestnut's current Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel, will assume the CEO role as current CEO David A. Sharar, Ph.D., transitions.

Sharar joined Chestnut in 1989 as an Employee Assistance Counselor and Training Specialist. He assumed various roles in the next 35 years including Director of Business Development and Compliance/Ethics Officer. From 2000 to 2015, Sharar was Managing Director for Chestnut Global Partners (CGP), a behavioral health/employee assistance firm with more than 600 employer customers and 1 million covered employees in more than 100 countries. Since 2003, he has conducted research part-time with Chestnut's Lighthouse Institute (LI). Sharar was Chestnut's Chief Clinical Officer from 2015 to 2018 before being named CEO.

He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; an M.S. degree from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, IL; and a B.A. from Knox College in Galesburg, IL. He holds graduate degrees in Public/Community Health and in Social

Work. Sharar has published more than 100 articles in peer reviewed journals and trade magazines. In his work with LI, he helped to develop a validated outcome tool, the Workplace Outcome Suite, used by more than 400 employee assistance providers and workplace wellness programs.

He will expand his role as an LI Research Scientist beginning in fall 2025.

Leekha joined Chestnut in 2015. He oversees business operations, business strategy, administrative departments, public policy, legislative affairs, legal and compliance, corporate governance and risk management in addition to representing Chestnut in business and industry circles. Leekha is active in statewide primary care and behavioral health trade groups and with the Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council, The CEO Council, and the McLean County Chamber of Commerce, for which he is the immediate past board of directors chairperson. Pro Bono work includes fundraising for ALS research and serving as former legal advisor for the Network of Indian Professionals.

He earned a J.D. from Chicago-Kent College of Law and a B.S.B.A. with majors in Finance and Marketing from Washington University in St. Louis.

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

Chestnut is a community-based health system that provides integrated primary and behavioral health services. Chestnut employs 800 people in Illinois, Missouri, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Annual revenues total \$80 million. Founded in 1973, Chestnut is Illinois' only organization that is simultaneously a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic, Federally Qualified Health Center, Community Mental Health Center, and U.S. Housing of Urban Development grantee. It is home to the largest research institute in the country housed in a community-based organization. Chestnut's strategic focus over the last several years has been driving integration of care across its six service lines: substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery; mental health; primary medical care, oral health care; housing and supportive services; and research.

More at www.chestnut.org.v