

St. Joe's Kevin Smith's now Niagara's hospital CEO

St. Joseph's Healthcare CEO sees move as 'evolution of care'

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The man once dubbed the Wayne Gretzky of health care is now going to be playing for two teams.

Dr. Kevin Smith, president and CEO of St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, has accepted the job as CEO of the Niagara Health System.

Smith, 50, had been serving as supervisor of the NHS since August 2011. His new permanent role was revealed Monday when Ontario Health Minister Deb Matthews announced the province was providing \$26.2 million to NHS to implement Smith's proposals for a new hospital in south Niagara and two urgent care centres.

Smith said he was approached in the fall about staying on as NHS's new CEO to provide continuity and accepted the offer during the Christmas holidays.

The Burlington resident doesn't believe he is taking on too much and notes he has already been doing both jobs for more than two years. He said a person does not have to be physically at a site to do a job because of the Internet, and noted a lot of his time over the last two years had been spent in Toronto.

"I'm very excited," Smith said. "I think it's a great opportunity."

He strongly pointed out it is not a Hamilton takeover of the NHS. He said a new NHS president — similar to the post Dr. David Higgins holds at St. Joseph's Hospital — will be recruited and hired "not presuming that what worked in Hamilton will work in Niagara."

Smith heads St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton and St. Joseph's Home Care in Hamilton, St. Joseph's Villa in Dundas, St. Joseph's Lifecare Centre in Brantford, St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph and St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener.

Chris Sherk, vice-chair of the St. Joseph's health system board, has described Smith as the Wayne Gretzky of health care, saying he is respected, smart and could go work anywhere he wants. Smith has also served as a supervisor for hospitals in Cambridge, Huronia, Sarnia and Midland.

Dr. Barry Wright, chair of the NHS board of directors, said in a statement he was thrilled that Smith agreed to serve as CEO of NHS.

Matthews said Smith provided "valuable advice" to the province and she was pleased residents of "Niagara will continue to benefit from his leadership."

Smith, who has been at St. Joseph's since 1995, sees being the CEO for two health systems as part of the evolution of health care — eliminating duplication, saving money for front-line services and the sharing of services such as lab work being done by St. Joseph's.

"I think we are going to see more and more opportunities to say 'Could one organization lead for many in certain domains?'" he said.

"It's 'Let's continue the trend that has been happening to really look at, you know, how can you maximize the benefit to all, respecting that (Niagara) is an unique region and population' ... I

think it is really the evolution of a more regional delivery network. We may be more than one corporation, but we have to be one system. To me, that is the ethos. If we do what is best for patient care, then we will evolve a good system."

Smith is paid \$645,126, plus \$76,227 taxable benefits, for his St. Joseph's position.

He said he has not accepted any additional remuneration for the last two years as supervisor and "I won't be receiving any additional money going forward. It will be the same salary that it was."

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