



PULASKI COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY News

September 2026

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Pulaski County Medical Society

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2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Pulaski County Medical Exchange

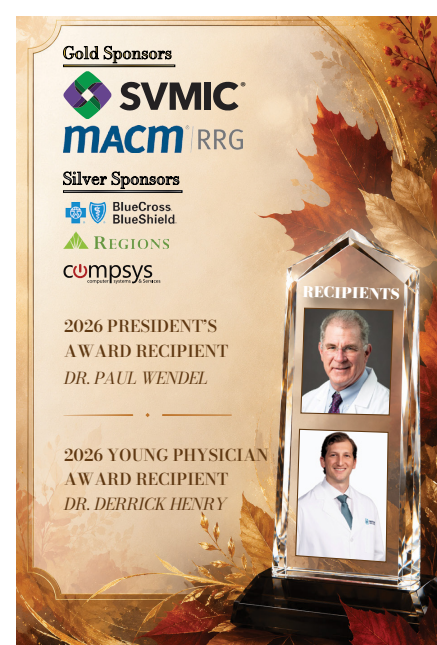
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When you think professional, ethical, quality healthcare,
think physicians of Pulaski County Medical Society.

2026 Annual Meeting and Dinner Invitation



Pulaski County Medical Exchange announces adjustment in service rates

The following notice was emailed to billing email address on file for users of the Pulaski County Medical Exchange on August 15, 2026.

"We are writing to inform you of an upcoming adjustment to the Medical Exchange service rate. Effective July 1, 2027 (Q3 2026), the rate will increase by \$2.00 per physician per month. We understand the importance of budget planning and are providing this notification well in advance of the effective date to allow you and your clinics ample time to incorporate this change into your 2026 budgets.

This adjustment, the second since 2005, reflects the significant increase in personnel costs over the past two decades. We are committed to providing competitive compensation and benefits to our employees, and this rate adjustment will help us ensure their continued well-being and maintain the high quality of service you expect."

Denial Management Pays Off

Elizabeth Woodcock, MBA, FACMPE, CPC

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Recent reports have demonstrated that denials are on the rise. Nearly 15 percent of all claims submitted to private insurance companies for reimbursement are initially denied. Though half of those denials are eventually overturned, the process is frustrating and costly. Not only do insurers have an economic incentive to deny claims, but the increasingly common use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the adjudication process also adds to the problem. For all its promise, AI doesn't have the capacity for nuance, at least not yet. This means that claims are denied based on whatever payment formula was established by the insurer, often leaving medical practices empty-handed.

The performance improvement process starts with understanding the current state of the revenue cycle. However, many medical practices don't have the capacity to review current processes and identify opportunities for improvement. Why? Denials aren't tracked correctly. Take the time to review your billing system's protocols for analyzing data about payment transactions from insurers. Payments are easy - it's the gap between the payment (if any) and the insurance contractual amount that needs to be scrutinized.

There is a fairly good chance a denied claim should actually have been paid. The key is to focus on each line item. For example - simply concluding: "Great! We got paid \$150 for that visit!" may result in leaving money on the table. Let's say "that" visit was six services - evaluation and management, immunization (and administration fee), venipuncture, EKG, and screening. Some things you should ask yourself: Did you get paid for each of the six services? If not, why?

- Perhaps the administration fee was paid at \$0, denied for being a bundled service. Was that determination consistent with the payer's requirements?
- Was each line item paid correctly? If not, why?

Another example could be that all payments were reduced because of penalties associated with not complying with Quality Payment Program requirements, thereby marked as CO237 and N807. Be sure to stay informed and take some time to dig-in - the full list of denial codes can be located [here](#).)

Identifying denials is challenging, due to the complexity of our reimbursement process. Employ the basic framework of splitting non-payments into controllable ("true" denials that could be overturned with effort by your staff) and non-controllable (contractual adjustments to which you agreed as enrolled providers that cannot be argued).

Consider these eleven denial management strategies to improve your bottom line:

1. Create a report of denials by payer, volume, and dollar; design a dashboard and request updates each month from your billing team.
2. Assign responsibility for denial management; divide between your coder(s) and biller(s) based on the reason for non-payment.
3. Prioritize efforts - don't spend hours working on a \$10 charge or the patients with their last name starting with "A;" sort the work queue by high dollars and high volume, then attack the list from there.
4. Engage your patient, as appropriate: "your insurance company has denied the authorization for this service..." Prompt them to call the insurer. Depending on the service, some patients are happy to proceed as self-pay (the insurance company may require advanced notice to the patient showing they are in agreement.)
5. Develop standard templates for appealing payers' decisions; create a library of communications indexed by category (e.g., coding, medical necessity, registration).
6. Leverage artificial intelligence to respond to simple denials; assign the complex ones to your staff.
7. Monitor efficacy; wait 30 days after an appeal - did the payer change their decision? If not, up the ante by submitting an appeal to the payer's medical director or other such higher-level tactic.
8. Measure and report (internally) the financial return on your efforts; include the payments received when a payer overturns a denial.

9. Dig into root causes; many denials originate in the practice - focus on preventing them, not just managing them.
10. Lean into the intake process: do we capture accurate information from patients? Equally, if not more importantly, how do we verify it? Turn over every rock; for example, you may find that your office-based registration works quite well, but problems lie in your inpatient consultation services.
11. Report habitual inappropriate denials to your state insurance commissioner and/or medical

If you need extra motivation to address denials, there is a higher purpose. Recognize that there are societal benefits to your efforts. If an insurance company denies a service over and over again, and we say (or do) nothing, the insurer may discontinue any payment consideration for that service in the future. This has happened many times, as we grow tired of getting denied and simply stop billing for the service. The insurer then has the upper hand, as there is no evidence that the services are even being provided. Please, if the service is eligible to be coded and billed, do it!



ContactSVMIC@svmic.com

800.342.2239 | svmic.com

2026 Annual Business Meeting Notifications

PCMS Bylaws state "The slate of candidates shall be presented to the Board of Directors for approval and shall be mailed to all members prior to the Annual Business Meeting". It also says "bylaws may be amended by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members voting at a regular or special meeting of the Society. Proposed amendments shall be mailed to all members at least thirty days before the vote on such amendments is taken".

Pulaski County Medical Society Board Nominees:

Officer Nominees

<i>Diane Wilder, MD</i>	<i>President</i>
<i>Derek Rudkin IOM, CAE</i>	<i>Secretary/Treasurer</i>
<i>Letitia Jones, MD</i>	<i>Immediate Past President</i>

Nominees for Board of Directors (2-year term)

Richard Wirges, MD
Yara Robertson, MD
Brandan Walser, MD

Pulaski County Medical Exchange Board Nominees:

Nominees for Board of Directors (1-year term)

<i>Jesse Abeler, MD</i>	<i>Marvin Ashford, MD</i>
<i>Jefferey Hartsell, MHSA</i>	<i>Richard Wirges, MD</i>
<i>Will Henson</i>	<i>Inge R. Carter, MD</i>
<i>Yara Robertson, MD</i>	

CARTI Foundation Welcomes Three New Board Members

The CARTI Foundation continues to advance the not-for-profit provider's mission of making trusted cancer care accessible with the support of three new board members: Kristi Moody, Kyle Morgan and Ardyth Neill.

"CARTI's impact over the past 50 years has been made possible through the generous support of our community, including foundation board members dedicated to reducing potential barriers to care for those facing cancer in our state," said Jennifer Selig, CFRE, executive director of the CARTI Foundation. "We are excited to welcome Kristi, Kyle, and Ardyth—industry leaders and champions of our mission—to the CARTI Foundation board."

Kristi Moody is deputy general counsel with Summit Utilities. She previously worked at Windstream for two decades, including as executive vice president, general counsel and chief compliance officer. She earned her J.D. from the William H. Bowen School of Law at the University of Arkansas and her bachelor's degree in political science from Louisiana Tech University.

Kyle Morgan is president of The Systems Group, a diverse group of companies engaged in fabrication, plant maintenance, products and construction for the steel and metals industries. A graduate of Arkansas State University with a bachelor's degree in international business and marketing, he also holds an MBA from Thunderbird School of Global Management.

Ardyth Neill retired from the Heifer Foundation in the summer of 2024 after serving as president, CFO/vice president of asset management and strategic advisor. Prior to that, she was director of accounting at Heifer International. She holds a bachelor's degree in business, accounting and economics from Drury University. She was a member of the CARTI, Inc. board from 2019-2026.

GastroArkansas Celebrates 55th Year

GastroArkansas is proud to be celebrating its 55th year in business. The physician-owned facility now has 12 physicians and 5 nurse practitioners, and treated more than 40,000 patients last year.

GastroArkansas started in 1971 with Drs. T.J. Smith, Don Browning and Robert Power, and it was central Arkansas' first gastroenterology practice. They brought in Jim Dunlap, a non-medical military man, as administrator so the doctors could focus on medicine and their patients.

As the clinic continued to grow, GastroArkansas also had the first female gastroenterologist in the state, Dr. Debra Morrison. It outgrew its space and continued to add more locations and bigger buildings.

Current Administrator Alisa Petet-McElfresh says the secret behind their success has been the people as well as their patient-focused mission. "It's all about the patient," said Petet-McElfresh. "It's all about how you treat the patients and you can not do that without amazing people."

This anniversary gives those currently at GastroArkansas an opportunity to look back and appreciate those who came before them.

"I'm grateful for what they built," said Petet-McElfresh. "It's an absolute privilege to have a small part in growing it and continuing the successes they started."



CHI St. Vincent is Out of Network with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas as of September 1, 2026

Despite more than a year of consistent efforts by CHI St. Vincent to reach a sustainable contract renewal, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas has been unwilling to agree to a fair contract that recognizes the vital role our hospitals, facilities and providers play in this community. As a result, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas no longer considers CHI St. Vincent as part of its network.

CHI St. Vincent sought a fair reimbursement agreement that would allow the health system to continue investing in the equipment, technology and staffing required for quality care. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas' refusal to offer rates that reflect the actual cost of providing care has led to this disruption.

"Since 1888, our mission has been to provide essential, life-saving care to all Arkansans, and we are disappointed that we have not been able to reach an equitable agreement with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas," said Dr. William G. Jones, CHI St. Vincent market president. "We have worked tirelessly to avoid this outcome, and believe that affordability and sustainability can coexist; however, we cannot continue to subsidize inadequate, unfair reimbursement rates at the expense of our clinical operations and the patients we serve. Fair reimbursement is not separate from our mission; it enables our mission."

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas is limiting access to critical services its members rely on, unique to CHI St. Vincent, including:

- CHI St. Vincent's Advanced Neuroscience program is home to world-renowned neurosurgeons treating patients with complex brain tumors and serious neurological conditions.
- The largest provider of heart surgery in Arkansas, recognized by the Society of Thoracic Surgeons for outstanding outcomes and named a Top 50 U.S. Hospital for Cardiovascular Care by Modern Healthcare in 2026.
- The only Labor and Delivery hospital in Southwest Arkansas.
- The only Pancreatic Disease Center of Excellence within 400 miles.
- A critical rural primary care lifeline — CHI St. Vincent's broad primary care network reaches deep into Arkansas's rural communities, where patients and families have no other options.

CHI St. Vincent remains committed to reaching an agreement with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas.

"We have not walked away from the table. We are doing everything we can to restore in-network access for the thousands of patients who rely on us for their care," Dr. Jones said. "We urge Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas to consider the needs of their members and accept our proposal, which reflects the true cost of care and prioritizes the health of our community."

CARTI Grows its Team of Fellowship-Trained Medical Oncologists



Jacob Leffert, M.D.

CARTI today announced that it has welcomed [Jacob Leffert, M.D.](#), expanding the not-for-profit provider's team of fellowship-trained medical oncologists to nearly 20. Dr. Leffert will serve patients at CARTI Clinic in Clinton, as well as CARTI Cancer Centers in Conway, Little Rock and Russellville.

"As patient need has risen, so too has our medical oncology program, ensuring no one must go without access to trusted cancer care," said Grace Raja, M.D., CARTI's medical director of medical oncology. "With his unique experience blending clinical practice and

research, we are excited to welcome Dr. Leffert to our growing team of compassionate, committed physicians."

Dr. Leffert earned his medical degree from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, where he also completed his residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in hematology and oncology. He graduated with honors from Hendrix College with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and molecular biology. Board-certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine, he is affiliated with the American College of Physicians, the American Medical Association, the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the American Society of Hematology.

Registration Now Open for the 4th Annual Baptist Health Neuroscience Symposium



The Baptist Health Neuroscience Center is excited to announce that registration is now officially open for the fourth annual Baptist Health Neuroscience Symposium, taking place on Friday, Oct. 16.

To ensure accessibility for all attendees, this year's symposium will be a hybrid event, offering both onsite and virtual attendance options. In-person sessions will be hosted at the City Center, 315 N. Shackleford Road in Little Rock.

This annual symposium is designed to provide cutting-edge educational opportunities centered on the prevention, diagnosis, and management of neuroscience patients.

The Baptist Health Neuroscience Symposium is open to all health care professionals looking to expand their expertise in neurological care, including:

- Physicians
- Nurses
- Emergency medical technicians (EMTs)
- Advanced practice providers
- Supporting health care professionals

Early registration is highly encouraged, as onsite seats are limited and expected to fill quickly. A comprehensive agenda detailing the schedule of events, speakers, and topics will be made available soon.

Registration is \$40 per attendee and includes lunch for onsite attendees. (Note: Class fees are non-refundable).

To secure your spot and learn more about the 4th Annual Baptist Health Neuroscience Symposium, visit baptist-health.org/misc/neuroscience-symposium. For any specific questions or further inquiries, please contact the event organizers at neurosymposium@baptist-health.org.

More Than 50 Arkansas Organizations Urge CMS to Approve Two-Year ARHOME Extension

"Giving Arkansas the time for careful, responsible deliberation is the best way to protect the more than 200,000 patients who depend on this coverage." – Naveen Patil, MD, AMS President

The Arkansas Medical Society and more than 50 healthcare organizations from across the state are urging Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Mehmet Oz, MD, to approve the Arkansas Department of Human Services' (DHS) request for a two-year extension of the Arkansas Health and Opportunity for Me (ARHOME) Section 1115 demonstration waiver. In a letter sent Wednesday, the coalition of physicians, clinics, hospitals, pharmacists, nurses, community health centers and other healthcare professionals and organizations serving patients across Arkansas asked CMS to grant the state the time requested for the transition.

ARHOME currently serves more than 200,000 Arkansans. As DHS explained in its August 5 request, changes in federal law and applicable budget-neutrality requirements mean the program cannot continue in its current form, and Arkansas will need to develop a new Medicaid delivery system. DHS requested the two-year extension to provide sufficient time to wind down the current program while

designing and implementing its successor, a request the coalition calls "reasonable and prudent."

"A transition involving more than 200,000 beneficiaries and the organizations that provide their care requires careful planning, clear communication and coordination," said Naveen Patil, MD, president of the Arkansas Medical Society. "As physicians, our first responsibility is to our patients."

"The broad spectrum of organizations signing this letter care for patients in every corner of Arkansas, and they signed for one reason: an orderly, deliberate transition is best for patients," said Carl Vogelpohl, executive director of the Arkansas Medical Society. "We urge CMS to grant the state the time it has requested."

"This is about getting it right," said Samuel Bledsoe, MD, president-elect of the Arkansas Medical Society. "Designing a new Medicaid delivery system for Arkansas will take close coordination among the state, CMS, the General Assembly and the people who deliver care every day. Arkansas's medical community stands ready to do our part, and a two-year extension gives everyone the time to do that work well."

[Click here for a link to the letter](#)

OrthoArkansas Welcomes Hand and Upper Extremity Surgeon Jared Bishop, MD

Fellowship-trained specialist brings advanced hand, wrist and elbow care to patients across Arkansas



Jared Bishop, MD

OrthoArkansas is pleased to welcome Jared Bishop, MD, a fellowship-trained hand and upper extremity surgeon, to its growing team of orthopedic specialists. Dr. Bishop will see patients at OrthoArkansas locations in Little Rock (Midtown), North Little Rock, and Arkadelphia, treating conditions of the hand, wrist and elbow.

Dr. Bishop treats a wide range of hand and upper extremity conditions, including wrist and small joint arthroscopy and acute and chronic fractures, and he performs peripheral nerve surgery. He also treats soft tissue and sports related injuries, Dupuytren's disease, and rheumatoid and other inflammatory arthritis, and

he performs wrist, thumb and small joint arthroplasty for patients who need joint replacement.

Dr. Bishop earned his medical degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine and completed his residency in orthopaedic surgery at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. He then completed a fellowship in hand and upper extremity surgery at the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center, where he trained in advanced arthroscopic and arthroplasty techniques alongside leading hand surgeons and gained specialized experience in microsurgery, fracture care, and tendon and nerve repair. Dr. Bishop is board-certified candidate and is a member of the Arkansas Medical Society. He also holds candidate membership with the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and the American Association for Hand Surgery.

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OrthoArkansas Welcomes Hand and Upper Extremity Surgeon Jared Bishop, MD

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Dr. Bishop grew up in Edmond, Oklahoma, where his mother's career as an OBGYN sparked his interest in medicine. He completed his undergraduate studies at Oklahoma State University. During his five years of residency, he was named Best Resident in Orthopaedics and built a lasting connection to Arkansas, one that brought him back to the state after fellowship. Today, he is focused on helping patients restore function and motion in the hand and upper extremity.

Outside of the clinic, Dr. Bishop enjoys spending time with his wife and three children. He's a devoted Oklahoma City Thunder fan, loves the outdoors, and is already working on turning his kids into Philadelphia Eagles fans.

Patients can schedule a visit with Dr. Bishop at OrthoArkansas.com or by calling 501-500-3500.

Jeannette Shorey, M.D., and Lindsay Thomas Pledge \$1 Million to UAMS to Create College of Medicine Scholarship Fund

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) received a \$1 million estate gift pledge from Jeannette "Jan" M. Shorey II, M.D., former associate provost for faculty, and Lindsay McFaddin Thomas to the UAMS College of Medicine to create the Shorey Family College of Medicine Scholarship.

"For many decades, UAMS has been a truly special place for me and my family, not only because of the purposeful work and wonderful memories we have experienced, but also for what the institution does for the people of Arkansas," said Shorey. "Education is the foundation of UAMS, supporting clinical care and research in the creation of the healthcare professionals of the future. I am honored to be able to help the medical students who will be the doctors that will one day serve our state."

The Shorey Family College of Medicine Scholarship will be a four-year, full tuition scholarship that will be awarded each year to a College of Medicine student who is an Arkansas resident.

"I am always humbled by the philanthropic generosity of former faculty and staff who continue to support the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences after their service," said UAMS Chancellor C. Lowry Barnes, M.D. "I want to personally thank Jan Shorey and her husband, Lindsay Thomas, for their family's continued stewardship of our institution, as well as inspiring others to support

UAMS in such a meaningful and impactful way."

Shorey received her medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1983 and completed her internal medicine residency at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. She joined the Harvard Medical School faculty, where she practiced medicine and directed primary care residency programs for 18 years. Shorey joined the UAMS faculty as an associate professor of geriatrics in 2002. She became associate dean in the College of Medicine in 2004, full professor in 2011, associate provost for faculty in 2015, and retired in 2020.

She is the daughter of Winston K. Shorey, M.D., former dean of the UAMS College of Medicine from 1961 through 1974, and Jeannette M. Shorey, M.D., who was a faculty member at UAMS and who directed the program that helped Vietnamese refugee physicians obtain U.S. medical licenses in the mid-1970s.

"Dr. Shorey and Mr. Thomas's generosity and vision has created a life-changing opportunity for future students in the College of Medicine," said Ron D. Robertson, M.D., dean of the College of Medicine. "Scholarships are becoming an increasing critical tool in creating outstanding doctors for Arkansas and play an important role in supporting our healthcare infrastructure. The legacy of the Shorey family continues to shine brightly at UAMS."

CHI St. Vincent Receives Second \$5 Million Gift From Alan and Boots Warrick *Warrick Family Has Now Given \$10 Million for Upcoming Anthony Center for Advanced Cardiac Care*

[CHI St. Vincent](#), a leading regional health network serving Central and Southwest Arkansas, has received a second gift of \$5 million from Alan and Boots Warrick to support the creation of the Anthony Center for Advanced Cardiac Care at St. Vincent Infirmary. The Warrick family has now committed \$10 million to the new Anthony Center, which is scheduled to begin construction in 2027.

"After our first gift, we were overwhelmed with personal responses from all over Arkansas thanking us for the donation," said Alan Warrick. "People we had never met were sharing their stories of how St. Vincent was there for them when they were having heart problems. It became clear to us that the Anthony Center would have an even

CHI St. Vincent Receives Second \$5 Million Gift From Alan and Boots Warrick

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greater impact on the Arkansas community than we initially realized."

The Warrick family's first gift was a match of a \$5 million donation from John Ed and Isabel Anthony that made the creation of the Anthony Center for Advanced Cardiac Care possible. After the gift was announced, the Warrick family received 53 messages thanking them for their gift and sharing stories of their experience with heart care at St. Vincent.

"We couldn't believe what we were seeing, how many people who reached out to us," said Boots Warrick. "These messages made us feel like we needed to do even more. We had planned out our giving to charities and organizations, but the response was so big that we felt we needed to go outside of our plan and give again to make sure the Anthony Center has the support it needs."

"There aren't words enough to express our gratitude to Alan and Boots Warrick for this second \$5 million gift," said St. Vincent Market President William G. Jones, MD. "The Warrick family has always shown its love and support for St. Vincent, and this second gift just proves

how much they care about this hospital and our patients. We are truly honored by their generosity."

The Anthony Center for Advanced Cardiac Care will be the new standard for the diagnosis and treatment of heart-related conditions. CHI St. Vincent Heart Institute is the largest heart program in the state and ranked #1 for heart care in Central Arkansas by U.S. News & World Report. The Anthony Center for Advanced Cardiac Care will allow CHI St. Vincent to continue to expand its heart program for the most complex cases, combining inpatient and outpatient heart care services including cardiac electrophysiology and cardiothoracic surgery programs in one location.

"Both Boots and I have experienced heart conditions in the past," said Alan Warrick. "We know how important it is to have access to quality heart healthcare. That's what we want for our community. We want to make sure that we're doing our part to help St. Vincent provide that care for people in Little Rock and Arkansas."

Construction on the Anthony Center for Advanced Cardiac Care is scheduled to begin in 2027. The Anthony Center will open in 2028.

Baptist Health Earns Recognition on Newsweek's 2026 America's Greatest Workplaces Lists

Baptist Health, Arkansas' most comprehensive health care organization, is proud to announce today that it has been named one of America's Greatest Workplaces in Arkansas 2026 and one of America's Greatest Workplaces in Health Care 2026 by Newsweek and Plant-A Insights Group.

These recognitions honor organizations that are successfully building people-first workplaces in today's evolving business environment. The awards are based on an evaluation of publicly available data and a confidential nationwide employee survey.

"At Baptist Health, we view our healing ministry as a calling that begins with how we care for our own," said Cathy Dickinson, chief human resources officer at Baptist Health. "Being recognized as a quality workplace is a testament to our team's shared commitment to compassion, respect and excellence. We are honored to foster an environment where every member of our ministry feels supported, valued and empowered to continue their important work of healing."

The comprehensive evaluation highlights organizations that prioritize employee well-being, strong leadership, fair compensation and work-life balance, as well as overall employee satisfaction and workplace culture.

The dual awards reflect Baptist Health's commitment to excellence on both a regional and industry-specific level.

Jennifer H. Cunningham, Newsweek editor-in-chief, noted, "Career vibes vary wildly depending on where you live. Newsweek and Plant-A Insights focused on a state-by-state breakdown to help you cut through the noise, spot the best local workplaces, and secure a job that actually aligns with your real-life needs."

Addressing the specific challenges of the medical field, Cunningham also added: "Faced with severe post-pandemic staffing shortages and systemic burnout, the health care industry must fundamentally rethink how it supports its frontline workers. Newsweek's ranking offers a rigorous evaluation of the hospitals and care networks that are actively prioritizing provider well-being and psychological safety. By honoring institutions that champion sustainable workloads and supportive leadership, we are defining the gold standard for workplaces where care providers can truly thrive."

