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# Aurelio Fernandez Retires as Memorial Healthcare CEO

By Daniel Casciato

Aurelio M. Fernandez, III, FACHE, CEO of Memorial Healthcare, will retire at the end of April after six years leading one of the state's largest healthcare networks, which includes six hospitals, urgent care centers, a nursing home and 14,000 full-time employees. Fernandez says he was ready to step down after a 45-year career in healthcare.

"We have a gem here in south Florida," he says. "Memorial has been providing the highest quality of care that is immeasurable, not just in our county, but south Florida. We

should be very proud to have that kind of resource in our backyard.”

Reflecting back on his tenure, one thing that surprised him was how cooperative all of the hospitals in the system were during the pandemic.

“Before the vaccines became available, when we were in the middle of the pandemic, all area hospitals collaborated and helped each other,” Fernandez says.

The pandemic of the past two years was certainly the most challenging time, he admits.

“We found ourselves in uncharted waters,” he says. “But we came out extremely well in providing the community we serve with the safest possible environment. We also did everything we needed to do to have a safe environment, such as providing PPEs for our physicians, nurses, and respiratory therapy staff.”

Fernandez, who was born in Havana, Cuba and has been a resident of South Florida for the past 61 years, has been a healthcare professional for over 45 years in the Tri-County market. Sixteen years ago he joined Memorial Hospital Miramar as CEO. He was promoted to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for the Memorial Healthcare System in 2012 and in 2016 was chosen as President and CEO of Memorial by the South Broward Hospital District Board of Commissioners.

Prior to joining Memorial Healthcare System, Fernandez spent 11 years in a variety of positions with Tenet Healthcare, including CEO at Hialeah Hospital and Florida Medical Center as well as Executive Director for Tenet Network Management. During the 1990’s, Fernandez was CEO of Palm-Med Health Services specializing in physician ventures as well as actively participating in organizing physician hospital organizations.

Throughout his 16 years at Memorial, he says the system always had the ability to have the resources to do what's right for the patients.

"Our mission is to be a community provider," he explains. "So in South Florida, not only did we have the safest environment, but the most comprehensive level of services, such as cardiology, neurosciences, and oncology, for patients in pediatrics to adulthood. Very few in our market have the resources necessary to deliver that. To me, that was a key differentiator between us and others in the market."

When asked about his greatest accomplishment, Fernandez says that it was the ability to elevate the organization to its full potential.

"You do that by engaging all the caregivers, support staff and medical staff to understand the mission and why we're here," he says. "We have accomplished that in a variety of ways and they're quantifiable and measurable. To me, that is our biggest accomplishment since I've been here."

Fernandez says he will miss the people at Memorial the most. "We have 14,000 employees," he says. "We have the finest executive and administrative team as well as a great employee workforce. There's a culture of collaboration and doing what's right for the patient and creating a safe environment that I have never seen in my career. I'll miss that. I'll also miss the fact that anytime we needed to do a project and went to the board commissioners to ask for the resources, they were there willing and able to provide us with the resources—not necessarily financial all the time, but in any aspect to augment the workforce and do a variety of other things."

As he dwells on the future of the healthcare system and where it's headed, Fernandez says that COVID-19 disrupted healthcare in such a way that it will never be the same.

"What we need to take advantage of, at least where Memorial is

concerned, is to invest a significant amount of resources, both in capital and personnel, to elevate our telecommunication platform and leverage it to create a much more robust virtual environment," he says. "Our numbers, when it comes to virtual visits and telemedicine, have just gone through the roof, but we need to go beyond that. We need to provide the consumer with access to healthcare, even when it's not in person, and leverage that technology to do it virtually and therefore improve access. I don't see us going back to the old ways of doing things. I'm a firm believer that we need to reallocate our capital dollars into technology. The more we do that, the more the consumer will have access to our services."

As for what's next for him? Fernandez plans to rest and take it easy—at least in the short term.

"I know I'm not going to do anything for six months to adjust to a new lifestyle," he says. "But after six months, I will reconsider what I'm going to be doing. I'm not interested in working full time; but maybe part-time. After 45 years of doing this, I think I've paid my dues!"

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