



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Dec. 2, 2019

### **Axis Health System CEO retires after 19 years of leadership**

**Durango, CO:** The Board of Directors of Axis Health System (AHS) announce the retirement of their Chief Executive Officer, Bern Heath, Ph.D. Dr. Heath has served as CEO for more than 19 years. Over that tenure, he has overseen tremendous growth of the organization and the transformation from a traditional community mental health center to a health system that brings together primary care, mental health, substance use treatment and oral health in one setting.

Under his leadership, AHS returned an inpatient, psychiatric resource to the region with the construction and operation of the first State-licensed Acute Treatment Unit. Axis also established the third Crisis Intervention Team (law enforcement partnership) in the State and the very first in the nation in a rural/frontier setting. Other accomplishments include the construction of three clinical facilities, the expansion of crisis services and the establishment of AHS as both a State-designated Community Mental Health Center and a federally designated primary care Community Health Center (FQHC) – the only such combined designation in Colorado and one of only a handful in the country.

Dr. Heath has been a leader and published nationally on the integration of healthcare. Most recently, Dr. Heath led the merger of AHS with Frontier Community Health Clinic based in Dove Creek – expected to be finalized in the spring of 2020. Over his tenure, the number of AHS staff has grown from approximately 50 to 275, and the number of AHS patients has grown from 1,400 to more than 12,000.

While Dr. Heath will step down on Jan. 3, 2020, he provided initial notice of his planned retirement in August of 2018, allowing the Board time to determine a successor. It is with excitement that the Board of Directors of Axis Health System announce the appointment of Shelly Burke as the new CEO, effective Jan. 4, 2020. Ms. Burke is an outstanding selection and has also been with Axis for 19 years. For the past seven years she has served as Chief Operating Officer and has played an essential role in the success of the organization.

“Shelly’s skills are well known and have been apparent throughout her tenure. Appointing her to the CEO role was not a hard decision, and Axis will not miss a beat in the transition,” said John Albright, President of the AHS Board of Directors.

*Axis Health System provides quality healthcare across the lifespan in Montezuma, Dolores, La Plata, San Juan and Archuleta counties. AHS has seven locations in Southwest Colorado and offers primary, behavioral and oral healthcare, and crisis response and stabilization. [www.AXIShealthsystem.org](http://www.AXIShealthsystem.org)*

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