



Newsletter | April 2020



**Exalta Health**<sup>®</sup>  
*Our community. Our health.*

**Exalta Health reflects the spirit of Christ by providing compassionate, accessible healthcare.**

## From Dan's Desk

When I retired from a three-decade career in public education, I wasn't sure what my next steps would be but leading a healthcare organization was certainly not on my immediate radar.

Yet the Lord had been leading me to Exalta Health, though I didn't know it at the time. First, I had a chance to attend an Exalta Health event, and there I felt a strong sense of the Holy Spirit. Not too long after that, president emeritus Bill Paxton asked me to set up a conversation for him with public school superintendents in neighborhoods served by Exalta Health. I did so, and I remember being impressed both by Bill and again by the work of Exalta Health.

Later I learned that both my dentist and my eye doctor volunteer their time at Exalta Health. Then, during the search process, I was a little early for an interview. As I waited, I was so moved as patients came and went. I remember thinking "Where would these folks go if this place didn't exist?" I realized that Exalta Health is the hands and feet of Christ, and I realized that I wanted to be part of that.

Now, a month or so after a one-month period of transition with Bill has ended, things have changed significantly, not just for Exalta Health but for our community in general and indeed our world.

I am so grateful for Bill's prior leadership of Exalta Health which laid a foundation that we can stand on as we deal with COVID-19. Bill's tenure here was marked by leadership, passion and dedication, and he did so much to move Exalta Health to new levels.

As COVID-19 began to impact our world and our work at Exalta Health, we as Christians had just

begun our Lenten journey, a time to reflect on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the heart of the Christian gospel. Our mortality had new meaning this Lent in a time of great anxiety and even fear. Yet, since 1996, the mission of Exalta Health has been to reflect the spirit of Christ and to provide compassionate, accessible healthcare for all.

Our main concern is always for our patients, and in this newsletter, you will read a recap by our medical director, Dr. Laura Vander Molen, about how we are responding to COVID-19 from a medical perspective. Know that we are in daily contact with appropriate local bodies, such as the Kent County Health Department, and please read Laura's piece for more details.

Know too that we are walking forward in a resurrection faith, as we always do at Exalta Health.

Blessed assurance propels us forward as we seek to be Christ's hands and Christ's feet to those we serve. In the midst of COVID-19 and subsequent decreases in revenue, staff reductions, time off without pay and cancelled appointments, we worry to be sure, but we remember always that Christ is risen indeed, that God is faithful and that we have the Spirit to guide us and walk beside us.

Please remember us in your prayers in the coming days and please especially remember those we serve, some of the most vulnerable members of our community. They too are scared, and we are doing all we can to surround them with Christ's peace and comfort.

*Dan Takens, President*

## Exalta Health and COVID-19

The last few weeks have been a whirlwind, and I am worried about what is to come. How do you prepare for something you do not know? Yet, that is what all of us are doing as we try to figure out how to help and protect our patients during this worldwide pandemic.



Since we first realized COVID-19 was coming, we have been following the directives of both the Centers for Disease Control and our local health department and local hospital systems. Initially it felt like every few hours we were changing protocols as more information came our way. The pace of change was dizzying. But what has made it work is our staff: our frontline medical and dental people, administrative folks, social workers, our chaplain, everyone. They have been amazing through it all.

One of the immediate impacts of COVID-19 was that we had to very quickly find new ways to connect to our patients. We did some research and found a platform for tele-health visits and then quickly taught ourselves how to use it with staff coming alongside our patients to be tech support if needed! Indeed, in those first days of this new way of delivering service, it was not unusual for one of our healthcare providers to be waiting on the virtual site as we heard our staff talk the patient through the steps to "check in" to their virtual visit. As we

continue to work with these new tools, the process continues to get better and better.

Still, we are deeply worried about our patients, many of whom struggle with access to technology but also deal with other significant challenges in their lives. The current situation is for them even more difficult than it is for many of us. That's why we are being proactive with our patients, calling all who are 40

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years of age and older to see how they are doing. These are just check-in visits, but they are more than that. They are an extension of who Exalta Health has always tried to be for its patients, a reflection of Christ's love and mercy. In these phone calls we also are helping our patients understand COVID-19 and why social distancing will help flatten the curve. We are also helping them think about what to do if someone gets sick. We are helping calm fears with truth and facts.

Finally, we are also working on a protocol for checking in on our patients who will be diagnosed with COVID 19. We want to walk with them through this tough time; we want to be the hands and feet of our Great Physician, Jesus, who heals the sick and weeps with those who weep. That's who we were before COVID-19. That's who we will be now and in the future.

*-Dr. Laura Vander Molen,  
Exalta Health medical director*

## Stories From Our Website



On Friday, February 7<sup>th</sup> Exalta Health hosted our most recent **Free Dental Day**. This free clinic, open to any person regardless ability to pay, is a joint effort of local volunteers and Exalta Health staff to address our community's critical need for dental care. Patients who

would otherwise be unable to afford to see a dentist expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to have their dental needs addressed.

Almost one year ago in June 2019, Exalta Health added both **pediatric medicine and pediatric dental services** to the many options we have been providing for adults. Our doctors and dentists are concerned for a child's entire spectrum of development, including physical, mental, social,

spiritual, and emotional health. These additional services allow family members to receive their medical and dental care in one location.

Last fall Exalta Health and the Michigan State University Extension teamed up to offer a **cooking and nutrition class** called *Cooking Matters*. Ten members of the community participated in the class and learned new cooking skills, healthier eating choices, meal planning, and more...all while having fun together in the kitchen. More classes will be held in 2020. Dates and times will be determined and posted on the Exalta Health website.



*To read more about these and other Exalta Health Stories, go to our website at [Exaltahealth.org](http://Exaltahealth.org)*

## Exalta Health Announces New Advancement Director

Sandra Muthyala is the new Advancement Director for Exalta Health.

She joins us from Ada Bible Church where she served as the women's ministry director at the Kentwood campus.

A former missionary, she is bi-lingual in English and Spanish and was born and raised in Uruguay. She became a Christ-follower when she was 19 and going to medical school. She then moved to Grand Rapids (hometown of the people who led her to Christ) and enrolled at Grace Bible College, where she met her husband.

At Exalta Health, she will direct the critical work of fund development, marketing and communications. In 2019, we served 1,100 medical patients, 1,200 dental patients and provided almost 10,000 total services, and almost 75 percent of our income came from individuals, foundations, corporations, churches, special events and donated services.

Though COVID-19 has changed our work in the short term (the clinic isn't currently seeing patients other than urgent care patients in person but is relying on tele-medicine and other methods to serve clients), Muthyala knows that it is more important

than ever for the organization to connect with donors and other key audiences as it waits for the time when it can again resume normal operations.

"I think we are seeing now more than ever how important a place like Exalta Health can be," she said. "Working with donors to make sure Exalta Health doesn't just survive but thrives is something I am so eager to be part of."

President Dan Takens agreed.

"As a missionary, she and her husband successfully built relationships with donors and churches to support their work," he said. "At Exalta Health, donors provide the majority of our funding and that is even more true during the COVID-19 outbreak. We are grateful to have her on board, and we believe that her highly developed communication and relationship skills will only enhance positive relationships with our donors."



## Significant Partnerships with Colleges and Universities



When Mary Change was first assigned to Exalta Health as part of her clinicals at Grand Valley, she didn't know what to expect. But when she looked up Exalta Health online, right away she took note of five key words on the homepage: *'Reflecting the spirit of Christ'*, and was encouraged.

*"Being raised in a Christian family, I wanted to be a part of a health system that integrated faith into the work it does and the lives of the people it serves. So Exalta Health was a good fit."*

Change is halfway through a three-year Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree Grand Valley's Kirkhof College of Nursing. She will graduate in April 2021 with a DNP and an Advanced Nursing Practice emphasis. She also has a college degree in biology in her native Nigeria and a nursing degree from Calvin University.

While taking a full-time load at GVSU and doing her clinicals at Exalta Health, she also works as a nurse

at the Meijer Heart Center, a position she has held for six years. While she admits the schedule can be overwhelming at times, she adds that Exalta Health has actually helped in that regard.

"Our prayer time and our scripture readings here," she says, "have been an important part of my work. For example, recently we read Proverbs 3:5-6: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.' It was very much what I needed, calmed me down and brought me peace."

Staff physician Dr. Chris Shoemaker, who is supervising Change, says Exalta Health partnerships with colleges and universities are significant to our clinic and to the students." Indeed, in 2019 approximately 75 students came to Exalta Health as their clinical site from Grand Valley, Ferris, Calvin, Davenport, Cornerstone, Michigan State University, University of Michigan, Grand Rapids Community College and Spring Arbor.

Of Change he says simply: "This is Mary's first clinical rotation. She is seeing patients, taking histories doing physicals and starting to place diagnoses and orders. She is an important part of the clinical team and is a pleasant, studious, interested learner. We're grateful to have her."



2060 Division Ave S, Grand Rapids, MI 49507  
 Address Service Requested

## SAVE THESE DATES



**ArtFeast8**  
 Exalta Health invites you to an evening of art filled elegance.

**NEW DATE!** June 18, 2020

Because of COVID-19, ArtFeast8 has been **rescheduled to June 18, 2020**



**GolfOuting**  
 Exalta Health invites you to a day on the green.

August 10, 2020

Please note that while we all look forward to this amazing event, it is possible we may move ArtFeast8 to a virtual event hosting an online auction for all of the donated items that we have received.



**Annual Luncheon**  
 We invite you to a luncheon to learn more about our programs and services.

October 7, 2020

Please contact Thressa at [thoekstra@exaltahealth.org](mailto:thoekstra@exaltahealth.org) if you have questions.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Exalta Health staff and volunteers begin each shift praying for our patients.