



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Building a Homegrown Health Care Workforce

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WVU Medicine – West Virginia University Health System

Albert L. Wright, Jr. is the President and CEO of the West Virginia University Health System, West Virginia's largest employer and the state's leading provider of advanced specialty care.

Wright previously served in several senior-level positions at both the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Ohio Health in Columbus, Ohio. In 2014, he was named President and CEO of West Virginia University Hospitals, the health system's 645-bed flagship and the state's leading academic medical center. He then became the health system's Chief Operating Officer while continuing to serve as the hospital CEO. In August 2016 – two years after his arrival – he was named the health system's Chief Executive Officer.

He obtained his bachelor's degree in pharmacy at the University of Toledo, a Master of Health Administration degree at The Ohio State University and his Doctor of Pharmacy degree at the University of Florida. He is involved in several charitable and civic organizations and serves on several boards.

WVU Medicine – West Virginia University Health System, a network of eight hospitals, four institutes, dozens of outpatient clinics and over 1,000 doctors, is experiencing tremendous growth. In the past year-and-a-half, more than 200 doctors from outside of West Virginia, and from some of the most prestigious academic medical centers in the United States, have been recruited to West Virginia University and WVU Medicine with the goal of expanding the number of health care services available to West Virginians. Our challenge now is to find a way to sustain this growth, as there is a shortage of skilled health care workers in our state, especially in nursing.



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As West Virginia has both a shortage of skilled health care workers and a large number of people who are either unemployed or under-employed, perhaps there is a way we can provide these individuals the necessary training to work in health care. Our own efforts, thus far, have

been internally focused, and we plan to weave additional resources into our benefits package for our employees and their families that will allow them to pursue new training and education. That's a good first step, but this requires a larger effort, one that extends beyond WVU Medicine.

The ultimate goal should be to build a more robust pipeline of highly skilled health care workers to sustain all the hospitals in West Virginia by training more West Virginians in these higher paying jobs and connecting them to our WVU Medicine hospitals and other West Virginia hospitals that are likewise challenged in filling these critical positions. How can the state's hospitals, working with the State of West Virginia, marshal their resources to help transition people who've lost their jobs, due to market forces or national policy changes in one sector, to a new career in the health care sector?

I recently read that all but a handful of West Virginia's counties have experienced an uptick in their unemployment – some worse than others. On the flip side, most West Virginia hospitals are struggling to staff operating rooms and other clinical programs with people who serve as the backbone of our clinical operation. How can we – WVU Medicine and other West Virginia hospitals – link ourselves to these individuals and provide them the training that leads to a career in health care? Beyond what we are planning – to extend to our own employees and their family members via enhanced benefits for training and education – what can we do more broadly

to build a new workforce to support our state's health care infrastructure?

Instead of hiring expensive, out-of-state "traveling" temporary employees who have the skills we need, what if we could tap into our own West Virginia family and provide them the resources to learn the technical skills necessary to move into a medical field? Not everyone may be a good fit or candidate, but there's already precedent for this: J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital, WVU Medicine's 645-bed flagship academic medical center, has many nurses who are former coal miners. Imagine a whole new generation of health care workers, from our own state, who could enjoy a better standard of living and work in a highly rewarding profession – one that generally provides a high degree of stability, growth

and opportunity, as well as the satisfaction of serving the people of West Virginia.

I'm committed to working with my fellow hospital CEOs, Governor Jim Justice and his economic and workforce development leaders, the legislature and our local communities to figure this out. There are probably a million or so details behind all this to make it work, but one thing this state has is lots of fortitude. After all, America, and certainly West Virginia, were built "on courage, on imagination and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand" (President Harry S. Truman).

I believe with lots of hard work, and even more imagination and determination, we can help some of our citizens find a new career path – one that leads to prosperity

and the dignity they deserve. We all win if we can pull this off, but it will take lots of good-thinking people to make it happen. If you have ideas, or want to be part of this, please drop me a line at [wrightal@wvumedicine.org](mailto:wrightal@wvumedicine.org). 

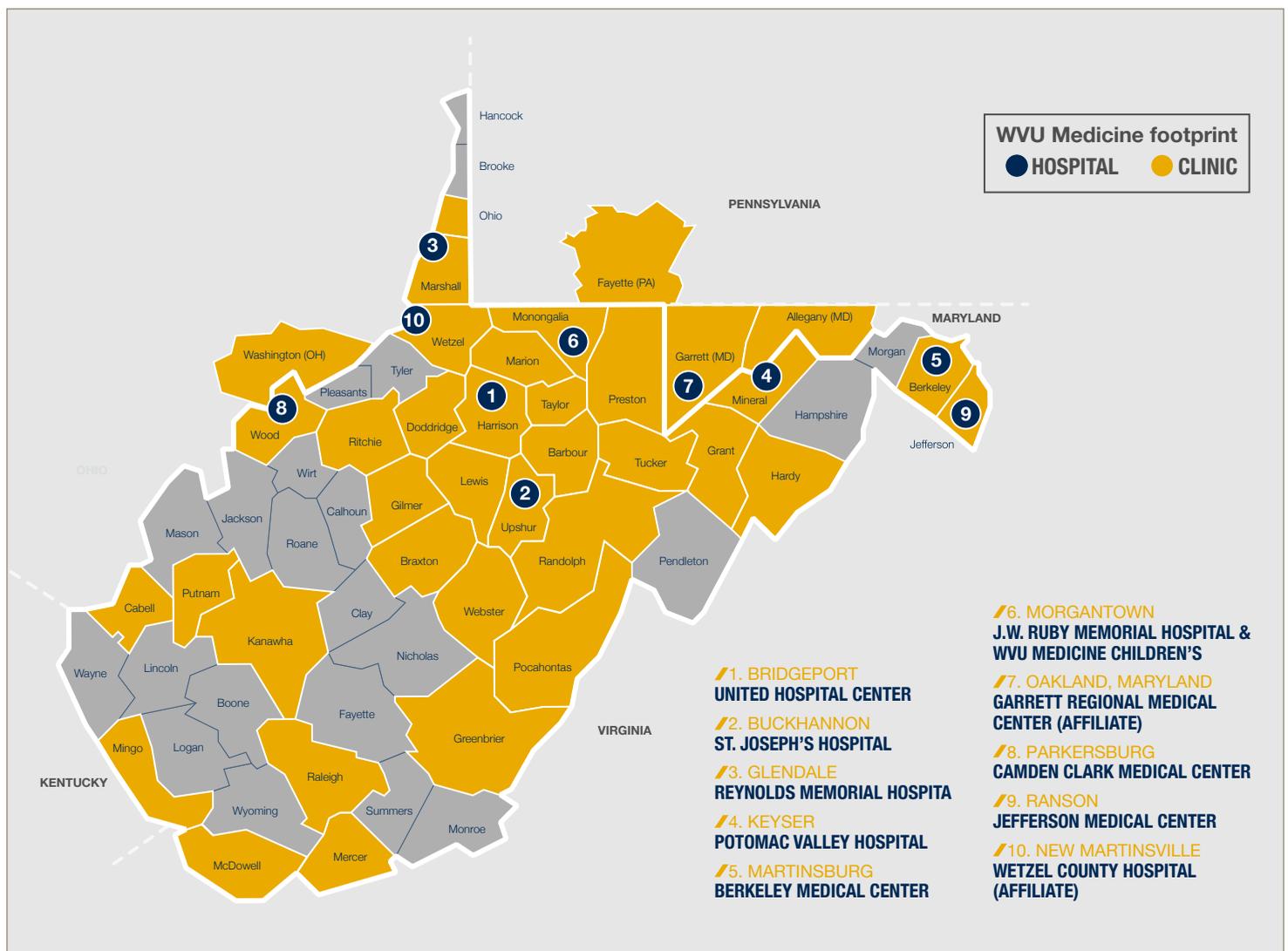


Chart excerpted from WVU Medicine's 2016 Annual Report