

UAMS News Bureau

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**Arkansas Rural Health Partnership Hires Rex Jones
as CEO, Names Mellie Bridewell New President**

LITTLE ROCK — Rex Jones is joining the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership (ARHP) as chief executive officer, effective May 1, 2022. He will succeed Mellie Bridewell, who will continue to serve the nonprofit as president, a new senior leadership position that will allow her to focus on strategic growth initiatives for the organization.

Bridewell also will maintain her position at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), which is a partner in the ARHP, as a regional director in the Office of Strategy Management. As ARHP's CEO, Jones will work with the UAMS strategy team on initiatives and collaborations focused on improving health care access and delivery in rural Arkansas.

“The Arkansas Rural Health Partnership has seen tremendous growth over the years, and under Bridewell’s leadership, we continue to add greater value to the rural health providers within the partnership,” said Brian Thomas, chairman of the organization’s board of directors. “On behalf of myself and my fellow board members, we are pleased to see the addition of Rex Jones and his leadership to the team. Together, he and Mellie will lead this great organization to new heights.”

Jones joins UAMS and the ARHP from Magnolia Regional Medical Center, where he is the chief executive officer, a position he has held since 2016. He also has served on the AHRP board of directors for eight years, including a stint as the board’s president from 2015 to 2016. A hospital administrator for 25 years, Jones has led rural hospitals in three states.

“As a rural hospital CEO and as a ARHP board member, Rex will bring the perspective and commitment needed as ARHP CEO to sustain and improve delivery of quality health care in south Arkansas,” said Stephanie Gardner, Pharm.D., Ed.D., UAMS provost and chief strategy officer. “We are grateful for Mellie’s tireless advocacy for rural communities and their health care needs during her tenure as the partnership’s CEO, and we are glad that as she steps into the role of ARHP president, we will not lose her energy or insight.”

Added Bridewell, who founded the nonprofit in 2008: “We are thrilled to add the expertise of Rex Jones to our senior leadership. His 25 years of experience as a rural hospital administrator will allow ARHP to provide critical and strategic support to rural health care organizations. This is a huge win for ARHP, UAMS and the many others championing health equity for rural residents across Arkansas.”

“I am really excited to work with Mellie, the ARHP and UAMS as we collaborate on a strategy to assist rural hospitals across Arkansas,” said Jones. “I appreciate UAMS and their forward vision to include people with rural hospital experience in the development of their strategy to assist rural hospitals and enable them to care for patients in their communities.”

Despite the impacts of COVID-19, the ARHP has experienced exponential growth within the past few years, including the addition of new rural hospital members, cross-sectional partners, a significant increase in grant and contract funding, and various new programs and services benefiting the health and wellness of rural residents. In addition, ARHP senior leadership have been consistently invited to contribute to planning and decision-making efforts impacting rural health at the local, regional, and national-level.

ARHP board members and senior leadership outlined the need for enhanced infrastructure and organizational restructuring to support continued growth during a strategic planning retreat held in May 2021. The first phase of infrastructure support was the addition of Frazier Edwards as the new vice president of strategic partnerships and business development. Edwards was hired in Fall 2021 to develop business lines directly supporting the financial viability of ARHP hospital members. The second phase of key personnel support is the addition of the president role.

About ARHP

ARHP is a nonprofit organization comprised of 14 rural hospital members, including Ashley County Medical Center, Baptist Health Stuttgart, Bradley County Medical Center, Chicot Memorial Medical Center, Dallas County Medical Center, Delta Memorial Hospital, DeWitt Hospital and Nursing Home, Drew Memorial Health System, Helena Regional Medical Center, Jefferson Regional Medical Center, Magnolia Regional Medical Center, McGehee Hospital, Medical Centers of South Arkansas and Ouachita Regional Medical Center, along with two Federally Qualified Health Systems (Mainline Health Systems and Mid Delta Health System), 92 owned/affiliated clinics and UAMS. Together these organizations continue to expand, nurture and provide programs throughout Arkansas rural communities to ensure access to quality and localized health care services and programs through collaborative efforts.

About UAMS

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W.

Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* recognized UAMS Medical Center as a Best Hospital for 2021-22; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide for the third year; and named five areas as high performing — colon cancer surgery, diabetes, hip replacement, knee replacement and stroke. *Forbes* magazine ranked UAMS as seventh in the nation on its Best Employers for Diversity list. UAMS also ranked in the top 30% nationwide on *Forbes*' Best Employers for Women list and was the only Arkansas employer included. UAMS has 3,047 students, 873 medical residents and fellows, and six dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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