



HOSPITALS COLLABORATE FOR KIDS

South Florida hospitals explore partnerships to expand pediatric care, generate efficiencies

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Faced with a growing wave of challenges, pediatric health care systems in South Florida are increasingly forming partnerships that could deliver patient care more efficiently.

¶ The largest children's health care systems in the region have been in a medical arms race for decades, competing over specialty physicians and nurses; opening new facilities; and buying costly equipment to treat rare, yet critical, conditions. ¶ However, the operating environment has become more difficult. Not only is there a shortage of health care providers, especially in pediatric specialties, but the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act includes significant cuts to Medicaid, which is a crucial source of funding for children's health services.

"The potential reductions, primarily at the federal level, are concerning," said Matthew Love, president and CEO of Nicklaus Children's Health System, which has about 70% of its patients on Medicaid. "That is one of the things that keeps me up at night ... A large percentage of kids in Florida are on Medicaid. Those are the kids who have trouble getting access to care. Not all physicians take Medicaid, so those kids tend to come to the ER or urgent care."

He hopes that partnerships and collaborations can mitigate those funding challenges.

The goal is to have more collaboration and referral of patients between the major health systems in South

Florida, instead of sending young patients out of the region, said Shane Strum, president and CEO of Broward Health, and interim CEO of Memorial Healthcare System.

"It's difficult to get an appointment, and it's hard for us to recruit the best and brightest [providers]," he said. "We want to create a destination and allow patients to stay in the tri-county area and get the best service."

Broward Health signed an agreement with Nicklaus Children's to staff pediatric care providers at two of its Broward County hospitals. They will call it Nicklaus Children's at Broward Health, and the Miami hospital will recruit for those posi-



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tions and help purchase equipment, Strum added.

Love said the idea for collaboration started in 2024, as he and Strum served on the Safety Net Hospital Alliance together and they spoke about how many kids were transferred from Broward County to its hospital every year. They wanted a

way to keep those children close to home.

Nicklaus Children's will hire specialists in pediatric care for the Broward Health hospitals, and they will only need to travel to Miami for major surgeries, Love said.

"How do we share resources and grow access points?" he said. "I

▲ *Shane Strum leads both Broward Health and Memorial Healthcare System.*

could see the partnerships and collaborations growing."

He pointed to Atlanta, where several children's hospital banded together to create a children's health network.

Both Love and Strum said they are interested in pursuing a partnership between Nicklaus Children's

and Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, which is part of the Memorial Healthcare System. For many years, they were the biggest competitors for both young patients and pediatric physician recruitment in the region.

Caitlin Stella, CEO of Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, said that

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Matthew Love, president and CEO of Nicklaus Children's Health System



Caitlin Stella, CEO of Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital

as resources get tighter and financial headwinds worsen, it will make more sense to partner. Just over half of pediatric hospital patients in Florida are paid for through Medicaid, and it's often higher at South Florida hospitals. Another challenge is that fewer medical students are training in pediatric medicine because it doesn't pay as well as adult medicine, she said.

If all of the pediatric hospitals are vying for the same limited resources, they will be inefficient, Stella said.

"We can direct a family to the place that is best for their care," she said. "We will have better access and better outcomes, and we don't have to spend our resources trying to gather the same thing."

Those services will be in demand more frequently due to an increase in high-risk births nationwide, and more babies born with high-risk conditions, Stella added.

"Anytime organizations can come together for the purposes of making pediatric health care better, I will be the first to stand in line and push that agenda forward," Love said. "We need to put our egos behind us and do what's right for the kids."

Strum said it would be a powerful thing to have Broward Health, Nicklaus Children's and Joe DiMaggio working together to provide world-class care. They could work as a referral center, with patients sent to the hospital with the best specialists for their particular condition, he said.

"We want to play off each other's strengths, because we can't be all things to all people," Strum said. "Physicians are incredibly collaborative and want to work together. The clinical research they could do is tremendous."

Joe DiMaggio and Broward Health have already started working more closely, as Strum leads both organizations. Joe DiMaggio agreed to provide pediatric services at a free-standing emergency center that Broward Health is building in Sunrise.

Nicklaus Children's is no stranger to partnerships, either. In 2022, it formed a partnership to provide

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pediatric services such as neonatal and pediatric intensive care at NCH North Naples Hospital. Then, in 2023, it launched a partnership with Jupiter Medical Center to open the De George Pediatric Unit with patient rooms, two surgery suites and a family lounge.

Since 2020, Nicklaus Children's has provided pediatric emergency care at Baptist Health South Florida's Baptist Hospital in Kendall and Homestead Hospital. Baptist Health has an agreement to transfer children who need inpatient care to Nicklaus Children's.

This year, Nicklaus Children's signed an academic partnership with Florida International University's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine. Love said Nicklaus Children's will have 350 members on the faculty at FIU by the end of this year, making it the largest pediatric training program in Florida. A major benefit of the partnership is conducting research, he said.

"By partnering with FIU, we can bridge the gap and translate research into patient care," Love said. "This will result in more recruitment, more training of physicians for residencies and fellowships, and increased access to care." ❧