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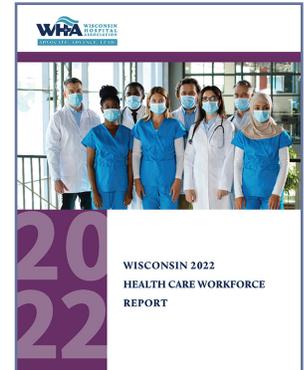
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WHA Report: Wisconsin’s Health Care Workforce Reached Tipping Point in 2021

An aging workforce combined with a spike in worker departures associated with nationwide employment disruption dubbed the “Great Resignation” created unprecedented levels of vacancy rates in health care professions in 2021, according to WHA’s [2022 Health Care Workforce Report](#).



Increasing pressure on the state’s health care workforce driven by retirements within health care fields at the same time demand for health care by an aging population is rising—a trend referred to as the “Silver Tsunami”—has long been cited in WHA’s annual Health Care Workforce Report as a cause for concern as the state seeks to maximize worker availability, longevity and success within the industry. Burnout among health care workers resulting from successive surges of COVID-19 cases over the past two years and escalating demand for delayed health care services has intensified a growing health care workforce shortage in the state.

Added to the stress placed upon hospital staff as they responded to unprecedented demand for health care services in 2021 driven by COVID-19 and pent-up demand for delayed care were pressures to fill gaps in the state’s public health response and to accommodate systemic failures in the continuum of care. Hospital and health system staff were called upon to educate their communities about COVID-19 spread and ways to avoid infection, administer COVID-19 vaccines and conduct COVID-19 testing. And as

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DHS Secretary-Designee Timberlake Headlines WHA-Sponsored WHN Newsmaker Event

“Every organization in this room was an important partner in our COVID response.”

WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding had the privilege of introducing Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake at a *Wisconsin Health News* Newsmaker luncheon in Madison on March 15. As a founding sponsor of *Wisconsin Health News* dating back to 2011, Borgerding welcomed the opportunity to address attendees, many of whom were WHA partners, in person.

In his introductory remarks, Borgerding noted that COVID revealed much about Wisconsin’s health care infrastructure. “As much as we in this room might want to, it will be a mistake to let COVID disappear entirely into the rearview mirror, because it has revealed strengths that we must leverage, and weaknesses we cannot leave unaddressed or revert to status quo.” These include shortages in the state’s health care workforce; shortcomings in the long-term care system, how this impacts hospital care and access and the need for new thinking on post-care; the public health system’s responsibilities and capacity; and the red tape between patients and their providers

(continued on page 2)

EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

March 23

WHA Advocacy Day 2022
Virtual

March 29

Wisconsin Hospital Association Health Care Workforce Virtual Forum

March 31

Leading the Conversation: DEI in Healthcare Conference
Webinar

(DHS Secretary-Designee Timberlake Headlines WHA-Sponsored WHN Newsmaker Event . . . from page 1)



that drive up health care costs. “The test is not only what we did to get through COVID; it’s what we now do because of COVID,” Borgerding said. View Borgerding’s comments on lessons learned from COVID-19 [here](#).

Borgerding thanked Secretary-designee Timberlake, along with Deputy Secretary Deb Standridge and the entire DHS team for their cooperation with Wisconsin’s hospitals and health systems throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fielding questions from *Wisconsin Health News* Editor Tim Stumm, Timberlake stressed the need for continued surveillance, testing and vaccination as Wisconsin continues to manage COVID spread. Even in areas of the state with high levels of vaccination, booster shots are lagging behind initial vaccine doses, Timberlake noted. And while the

“foreseeable future” is encouraging as it relates to continuous easing of COVID restrictions, Timberlake cautioned that the public should be prepared to resume mitigation measures if they are needed, both at an individual level and as a population-based response to rising COVID cases.



Addressing the political divide that has only widened over the past two years, Timberlake encouraged audience members and the public in general to bring conversations down to a personal level. Government, she said, has an undeniable role to play in responding to a widespread health crisis, but so, too, do individuals.

Responding to an audience member question about the future of Wisconsin’s health care workforce, Timberlake observed that demographic trends are not working in Wisconsin’s favor. Timberlake said that health care stakeholders will need to work together to build systems that allow health care providers to “do more with the workforce we have.”

WHA Health Care Workforce Forum to Seek Collaborative Solutions to Worker Shortage

WHA will host a complimentary webinar to explore challenges and opportunities to sustain and strengthen Wisconsin’s health care workforce.

[Wisconsin Hospital Association Health Care Workforce Forum](#)

March 29 | 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Addressing the health care workforce shortage that has been building in Wisconsin and has been exacerbated by COVID-19 will require a concerted and sustained strategy involving health care organizations, educators and policymakers. This strategy must encourage, support and advance health care workers in their pursuit of fulfilling and meaningful careers. *(continued on page 3)*

(WHA Health Care Workforce Forum to Seek Collaborative Solutions to Worker Shortage . . . from page 2)

WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk will discuss the impact the Silver Tsunami, the Great Resignation and a persistent pandemic that pushed hospital occupancy to its limit has had on Wisconsin's health care workforce.

This WHA member-only virtual event will lay the foundation for a day-long forum being planned for September 2022 for WHA members and other key stakeholders to discuss the workforce challenges confronting hospitals and health systems and to learn about innovative strategies to address these challenges from expert speakers and from each other.

More information and online registration is available [here](#). Contact WHA Vice President of Education and Marketing [Leigh Ann Larson](#) with questions.

NEXT WEEK: Advocacy Day 2022, Virtual

Last chance to register

WHA's virtual Advocacy Day is less than a week away, and excitement is building among the nearly 900 advocates who have signed up to participate. Advocacy Day 2022 will take place virtually on March 23. The [registration](#) deadline is Friday, March 18 at 5:00 p.m. Individuals and hospitals interested registering groups of attendees for the state's premier advocacy event are encouraged to complete their registrations today.

This year's keynote presentation will feature [Dr. Scott Gottlieb](#), physician and former Commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, in a moderated discussion with WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding.

Gottlieb's work focuses on advancing public health through developing and implementing innovative approaches to improving medical outcomes, reshaping health care delivery and expanding consumer choice and safety. Gottlieb serves on the boards of Pfizer Inc. and Illumina, Inc., is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a partner at the venture capital firm New Enterprise Associates.

Gottlieb is widely published in leading medical journals and periodicals, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. He has held editorial positions on the *British Medical Journal* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and is a regular contributor to CNBC. *Fortune Magazine* recognized him as one of the "World's 50 Greatest Leaders" in 2018 and again in 2019. In 2018, 2019 and then again in 2020, *Modern Healthcare* named Dr. Gottlieb the "Most Influential Physician Executive and Leaders" in its annual survey of 50 physician executives, and *Time* magazine named him one of its "50 People Transforming Healthcare in 2018." Dr. Gottlieb is also the author of New York Times Bestseller *Uncontrolled Spread: Why COVID-19 Crushed Us and How We Can Defeat the Next Pandemic*.

Following the keynote presentation will be the always-popular bipartisan legislative leadership panel discussion. As always, the panel provides attendees in-depth insight into the state budget and issues facing health care providers and patients in our state. Advocacy Day attendees will also hear special guest remarks from Gov. Tony Evers. View the full Advocacy Day program [agenda](#).

Bipartisan Legislative Panel CONFIRMED



Senator Joan Ballweg
(R-Markesan)



Senator LaTonya Johnson
(D-Milwaukee)



Representative Tony Kutz
(R-Wonewoc)



Representative Evan Goyke
(D-Milwaukee)

Legislative Visits

Advocacy Day attendees have the opportunity to attend [legislative visits](#) on Wednesday and Thursday, March 23 and 24. More information can be found [here](#). WHA strongly believes the legislative meetings are the most important part of Advocacy Day. These visits are an opportunity to directly connect with your state lawmakers on health care issues and share your experiences in your hospital or health system. **It's not too late to add a legislative visit.** Contact [Laurie Fleurette](#) with questions or to add a legislative visit to your registration.



Special Guest Governor Tony Evers

Prepare for Advocacy Day

Registered attendees are encouraged to log into the Advocacy Day event platform, LeaderPass, in advance of the live event on March 23. Individuals will need to create a LeaderPass account with the email used in their registration to access the Advocacy Day event and related content. Individuals who participated in Advocacy Day last year already have accounts and can reset their password. If you are experiencing issues with creating or accessing a LeaderPass account, contact LeaderPass directly for support at support@leaderpass.com.

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WHA Cautions Medical Examining Board – New Chaperone Proposal Still Costly

Board forms committee to get stakeholder input

Changes to a new chaperone rule proposed by the Medical Examining Board (MEB) are not going to be enough to mitigate the more than \$55 million economic impact of that rule on Wisconsin physicians and the facilities where they work. That was the message that WHA and the Wisconsin Medical Society delivered to the Medical Examining Board (MEB) in a [joint letter](#) to MEB Chair Sheldon Wasserman.

WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk and Wisconsin Medical Society (WisMed) Chief Policy and Advocacy Officer Mark Grapentine shared their concerns in a joint letter to MEB based on their review of a new draft rule posted with the agenda for the MEB's March meeting. "Upon initial analysis of the new draft language, we do not believe that the changes will significantly reduce the \$55 million in annual implementation and compliance costs of the October 20, 2021, rule identified by the Department of Safety and Professional Services," the joint WHA-WisMed letter stated.

During discussion at the March 16 meeting, Zenk commented on both the economic impact and the workforce impact of the current proposal, noting, "The people we need to fulfill chaperone duties are where we're experiencing some of the greatest shortages and the greatest competition—entry-level professionals like medical assistants and techs." Zenk added, "The implementation of this rule will require hiring additional staff, and when those staff can't be found, will impact patient access and physician workflow."

WHA and the Medical Society also reiterated in the letter the offer made in WHA's Nov. 15, 2021, letter (see [story in March 3 edition](#) of *The Valued Voice*) to work with the Department of Safety and Professional Services and MEB, as well as other stakeholders to help craft a rule that will meet the shared goal of MEB to appropriately identify and discipline physicians with patterns of practice that violate Wisconsin statutes and rules of conduct for Wisconsin physicians.

MEB's decision, after discussion and consideration of points made by WHA, WisMed and MEB members, was to form a committee of MEB members to work with the Wisconsin Medical Society, WHA and other stakeholders to, as the WHA/WisMed letter notes, "... help aid the Board's work toward ultimately advancing a revised rule through the rulemaking process."

WHA Voices Support for Easing Licensure Delays at Assembly Informational Hearing

WHA voiced support for the Wisconsin Legislature and State Department of Safety and Professional Services partnering to ease licensure delays at an informational hearing held by the Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform on March 16.

On the same day that WHA released its 18th annual [Wisconsin Health Care Workforce Report](#), WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk highlighted in [written testimony](#) to the committee the past proactive work WHA has done in partnership with the Legislature to grow our health care workforce. Specifically, WHA's testimony highlighted the physician residency and advanced practice training grants which will have created 136 new physician residency training positions and 40 more advanced practice and allied health professional clinical training opportunities by 2023.

WHA also recognized the importance of the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, the enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact and 2021 Wisconsin Act 10—all of which have made it easier for health care professionals in good standing from other states to obtain licensure in Wisconsin. Another innovative approach passed by the Legislature recently and signed by Gov. Tony Evers last week as 2021 Act 158 creates an expedited pathway for returning military medics, corpsmen and medical technicians to begin using their skills in the civilian world while they complete the training and education requirements for state licensure.

Despite all these successful and innovative efforts, WHA continues to hear from members facing long wait times for licensure, typically from individuals ineligible for one of the various streamlined pathways. In its written testimony, WHA noted the positive relationship it has developed with Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) and its work to get delayed licenses "unstuck." WHA also voiced its support for the Legislature and DSPS continuing to work to improve the process and look at innovative ideas such as a probationary license for Wisconsinites who newly complete their training and pass their exams, similar to 2021 Act 10.

In addition to WHA, the committee heard from other groups such as the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists and other health care providers, who all provided their own examples of delays health care professionals in their fields have faced and echoed the need to find innovative methods to expedite licensure for qualified applicants in health care fields.

Contact WHA Vice President of Federal and State Relations [Jon Hoelter](#) with questions.

WHA Foundation Report Highlights Investments, Program Outcomes



The recently published [WHA Foundation 2021 Year in Review Report](#) details the many ways the foundation provided recognition and critical funding over the past year to valuable programs that positively impact Wisconsin hospitals, their staff and the communities they serve. The report also contains information on how

to become a Friend of the Foundation. Questions about the report or the foundation in general can be addressed to WHA Foundation Executive Director [Leigh Ann Larson](#).

Application Period for WHA Foundation 2022 Simulation Lab Scholarships Now Open

The WHA Foundation is once again offering scholarships for member hospitals to participate in clinical simulation training focused on stroke, severe sepsis/septic shock, opioid crisis (new this year) or high-risk OB delivery. The WHA Foundation is offering seven scholarships for interdisciplinary teams to participate in these training sessions offered at two clinical simulation labs. The deadline to apply is Friday, April 15, at 5:00 p.m.

Information on scholarship eligibility and criteria is available [here](#). Details on which simulations are available at the training sites in Eau Claire and La Crosse is available [here](#). The application for simulation training scholarships can be accessed [here](#).

Questions related to this program can be directed to WHA Foundation Executive Director [Leigh Ann Larson](#).

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they creatively adapted their physical spaces to treat COVID and non-COVID patients alike, their capacity to do so was challenged by an inability of nursing homes to accept patients no longer requiring hospital-level care. At one point in 2021, WHA estimates that 600 patients were occupying hospital beds in Wisconsin awaiting admission to a nursing home or other long-term care facility.

The combination of the Silver Tsunami, the Great Resignation and a persistent pandemic that pushed hospital occupancy to its limit resulted in an increase in vacancies in 13 of 17 professions tracked in WHA's Health Care Workforce Report, with seven positions registering double-digit vacancy rates. Registered nurse vacancy rates were the highest they've been since 2005, leading WHA to note, "The nursing shortage has arrived."

Vacancy rates, according to the report, are highest for frontline clinical and technical staff and lower in professions with a longer runway to practice, apart from occupational and physical therapists, where vacancy rates rose sharply.

WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk observed, "Our health care workforce has shouldered an enormous professional, mental and emotional burden over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are understandably drained. They have cared for us through extremely challenging circumstances and at a time when their own ranks were depleted by illness and burnout. Wisconsin's health care workers now more than ever deserve our understanding and commitment as we together seek to fill gaps between workforce supply and demand in order to maintain our state's high-quality care."

"Addressing the health care workforce shortage that has been building in Wisconsin and which has been exacerbated by COVID-19 will require a concerted and sustained strategy involving health care organizations, educators and policymakers that encourages, supports and advances health care workers in their pursuit of fulfilling and meaningful careers," said WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding in response to the 2022 Health Care Workforce Report data.

As the state's health care industry seeks to attract new workers and build new capacity from within, it must also adapt to the expectations of a new, younger workforce, WHA notes, recommending collaboration among health care stakeholders in support of organizational, public and payer policies that achieve the following:

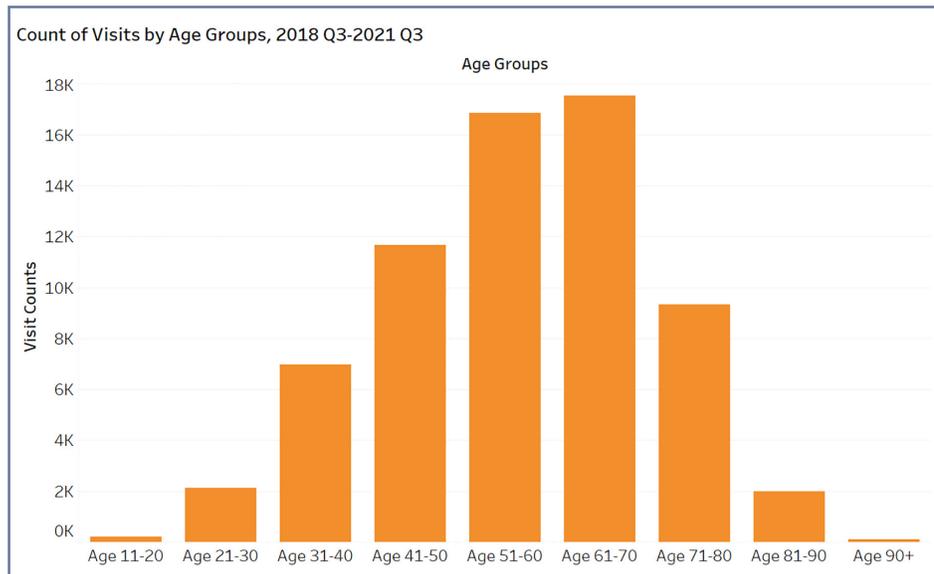
1. Build public-private partnerships to "Grow Our Own" Wisconsin health care workforce;
2. Promote rapid innovations to retain and recruit workers to Wisconsin's health care workforce;
3. Break down barriers to top-of-skill practice;
4. Further bolster acceptance and efficient utilization of telemedicine and technology;
5. Reduce regulatory burden and increase regulatory flexibility; and,
6. Support care in the best setting—inpatient, outpatient or post-acute.

Preparation for the inevitable next global health emergency demands that the state also take stock of its public health infrastructure and address payer practices that impede efficient and effective health care delivery.

Download the full Wisconsin 2022 Health Care Workforce Report [here](#). Questions about the report can be directed to [Ann Zenk](#).

Fast Facts from the WHA Information Center: March is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

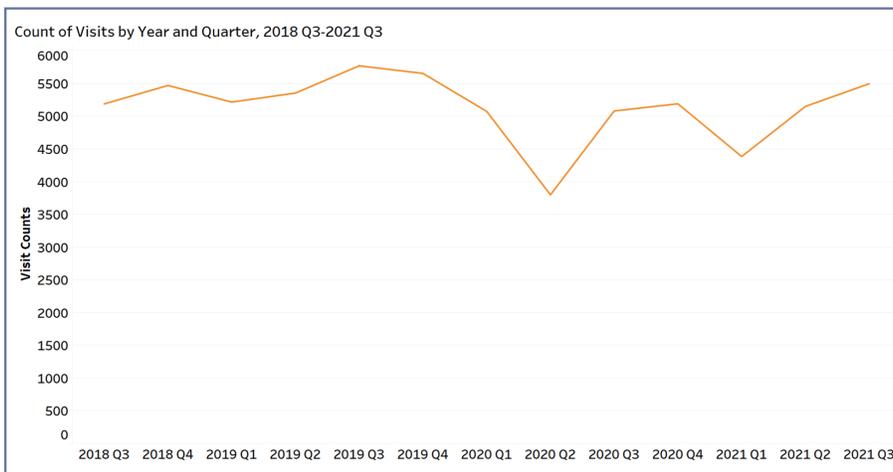
Since 2003, March has been designated Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month to draw attention to the crippling diseases of the central nervous system. This year, March 13-20 is also Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week. As of 2019, almost one million people in the United States are living with multiple sclerosis (MS). According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), MS is “an unpredictable disease of the central nervous system disrupting communication between the brain and other parts of the body.” NIH also states that many believe MS is an autoimmune disease—meaning that the body launches a defense attack against its own cells.



The WHA Information Center analyzed claims for MS from October 2018 to September 2021. The age group with the highest hospital visit count during this period was 61-70, followed closely by the 51-60 age group. The average age of an MS-related visit was 56 years old. The graph highlights visit counts, rather than diagnosis age.

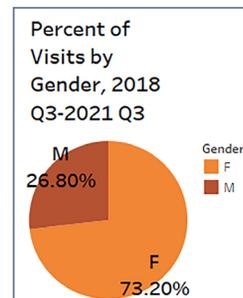
Women accounted for almost 75% of all MS hospital visits during the year studied, aligning with the national data showing women are three times as likely to be affected by MS as men. The ZIP code with the highest count of visits for MS was in Milwaukee County. The next highest ZIP code was in Manitowoc County.

NIH reports that most people’s first symptoms of MS appear between the ages of 20-40. There are many initial symptoms of MS, including prickling, or “pins and needles,” double or blurred vision, color distortion for red/green shades or blindness in one eye. Other symptoms include difficulty with balance and coordination, speech impediments, tremors, muscle weakness in extremities and in some cases, partial or complete paralysis. There is currently no cure for MS, but certain medications may help slow and control symptoms.



Risk factors researchers have found that may possibly cause MS include the following:

- After being exposed to a certain type of slow acting virus like measles, herpes or Epstein-Barr, some researchers theorize that MS can develop in genetically susceptible people.
- Some researchers looked at connections between nutrition and MS. There are ideas surrounding a diet rich in saturated fat intake as well as deficiencies in fish oil and vitamin D that may increase one’s risk of MS.
- A theory posits that those living closer to the equator are exposed to more sunlight and therefore are less likely to experience a vitamin D deficiency, decreasing the risk of developing MS.



In Memoriam: Diane Postler-Slaterry



Diane Postler-Slaterry

MyMichigan Health president and CEO Diane Postler-Slaterry, 62, [died along with her husband in a plane crash](#) in Florida on March 8.

Before becoming MyMichigan Health president and chief executive officer in 2013, Postler-Slaterry was president and chief operating officer of Aspirus Wausau Hospital. She began her 24-year service to Aspirus as an intensive care nurse and served as chief operating officer prior to her appointment as the hospital's top leader.

Postler-Slaterry's history of service to the health care industry in Wisconsin includes serving as North Central Region president from 2007-2008 and region alternate from 2009-2012. She was a WHA Public Policy Council member from 2005-2008 and served

as council chair from 2009-2013. She served on the Wisconsin Hospital Association Information Center Board from 2009-2012 and on WHA's Executive Committee from 2009-2012.

When she was chief operating officer at Aspirus Wausau Hospital in 2004, Postler-Slaterry was named Nurse of the Year by the Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives. In nominating her for the award, then-chairman of Aspirus Hospital's board of directors Stuart Carlson called Postler-Slaterry "an outstanding spokesperson and advocate for the hospital and the entire nursing profession." Postler-Slaterry was also named "Best of the Best" by the Partners of WHA in 2010 for excellence in health care administration. Aspirus volunteers noted in their nomination of Postler-Slaterry that she regularly walked around the hospitals to interact with and thank volunteers individually to let them know they are valued.



Diane Postler-Slaterry, RN, chief patient care executive of Wausau Hospital, speaks at a Capitol news conference April 15, 2002 against the ban on Wisconsin's hospitals from undertaking any future modernization, renovation or construction projects.

WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding also remembers Postler-Slaterry as both a talented health care practitioner and an effective industry advocate, lending her voice, for example, to successful opposition to a proposed ban on hospital construction in 2002.

"Diane's untimely passing is felt far and wide. In Wisconsin, we



Diane Postler-Slaterry, president/COO, Aspirus Wausau Hospital, was recognized for her service to the Association at what was to be her last meeting as chair of the WHA Public Policy Council. Postler-Slaterry has served on the Council for seven years and has chaired it for the past four.

WHA Executive Vice President Eric Borgerding praised Diane's service and noted one of her early advocacy efforts was in 2002 when she came down to Madison to participate in a WHA capitol news conference blasting the then-proposed hospital building ban, which was defeated.

Postler-Slaterry will be leaving Wisconsin to assume her duties as president/CEO of MidMichigan Health in Midland, Michigan.

This appeared in the Nov. 21, 2012 issue of The Valued Voice.

remember Diane as a passionate advocate that we were so fortunate to have on our member team. She was an outstanding person who inspired the WHA staff to lead and take on tough issues with conviction," Borgerding said. "This is a devastating loss for so many, and while we grieve with her family and loved ones, we are grateful for the time we spent working together. Diane left an indelible mark on health care and all those who knew her."

Diane and her husband Don are survived by three children and five grandchildren.

(NEXT WEEK: Advocacy Day 2022, Virtual . . . continued from page 3)

On March 16, WHA staff held a pre-Advocacy Day webinar to prepare advocates for Advocacy Day and their legislative visits, including an overview of the issue topics WHA will ask advocates to discuss during their legislative appointments. The webinar was recorded and will be available for all registered attendees in the LeaderPass event platform. Advocacy Day issue papers and talking points will also be added to the virtual event platform prior to Advocacy Day.

For questions related to Advocacy Day, contact WHA Vice President of Advocacy [Kari Hofer](#).