

To the Editor, Guest Opinion - February 23, 2026

Together, we fear for the future of Confluence Health and the sophisticated level of care it has nurtured in North Central Washington!

The 2012 affiliation was built on a deliberate and forward-looking vision: to create a vertically integrated health system capable of meeting the evolving demands of healthcare reform, preserving local leadership, expanding access to high-quality care close to home, stabilizing a vital regional economic sector, eliminating costly duplication of services, and ensuring that physicians and administrators worked side-by-side in shared governance.

This model, where physicians and administrators are aligned in mission and purpose, has been the foundation of Confluence Health's success.

Today, that foundation is under significant threat.

In October 2025, Pete Rutherford was contacted by the CH Board for an interview. They were conducting an investigation after receiving a letter from the Wenatchee Valley Medical Group Board that stated an overwhelming majority of their physicians had expressed a lack of confidence in the CH CEO, Andrew Jones.

Such collective action is extraordinarily rare in healthcare. Physicians are typically measured and private in their concerns. When nearly all physicians speak in one voice, it reflects deep and serious organizational distress.

The Confluence Health Board conducted an investigation and determined there were no grounds for removal of the CEO. That decision is within the Board's authority. However, the broader question remains: how does a health system function effectively when the vast majority of its physicians feel unheard and disengaged? And what is Confluence Health's plan to repair this vital relationship? This question is especially important in today's healthcare climate where reimbursements continue to shrink and expenses continue to rise.

Confluence Health's affiliation agreements expire in 2027. The future structure of our regional health system is not hypothetical. If alignment between physicians and system leadership is not restored, the consequences could include difficulty recruiting and retaining physicians, declining morale, and reduced access to specialized services. **We could lose our independent health system.**

None of those outcomes serve patients or our community.

The recent approval of a \$60 million Cancer Center project without significant strategic input or appropriate vetting further underscores the importance of collaboration and transparency. Major capital investments must be evaluated not only for their promise, but also for their opportunity costs. In healthcare, every dollar allocated to one initiative limits investment elsewhere. Robust

physician engagement and clear communication are essential to maintaining trust — both internally and with the community.

Confluence Health is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that **exists for the benefit of the residents of North Central Washington**. The CH Board serves as steward of that mission. Stewardship includes ensuring that physicians — those who deliver care every day — are included in governance and strategic direction to ensure patients are at the heart of every decision.

We remember the divisions of the 1990s when what was then Wenatchee Valley Medical Center and Central Washington Hospital were battling. The creation of Confluence Health was the result of leaders from both organizations choosing unity over fragmentation. The principle of “Better Together” guided that effort.

We believe that principle still holds true.

But partnership requires mutual respect, active listening, and meaningful engagement. When nearly the entire physician body signals serious concern, the appropriate response is not dismissal — it is renewed dialogue.

Our community deserves a healthcare system where physicians and leadership collaborate. The stability and strength of healthcare in North Central Washington depend on it. We implore the Confluence Health Board to work with the physicians to ensure high quality, comprehensive healthcare persists in our community.

It is never too late to do the right thing.

Jack Evans

Peter Rutherford, MD

About the Authors:

I, Jack Evans, the former CEO of Central Washington Hospital, was recruited in 1996 and hired with the express duty of improving the relationship between Central Washington Hospital (CWH) and the Wenatchee Valley Medical Center (WVMC) and later initiating their affiliation to become Confluence Health (CH).

I, Peter Rutherford, was raised in Wenatchee and practiced medicine here since 1990 with subsequent leadership roles including Board Member of CWH Board, Board President of WVMC and the first CEO of Confluence Health (CH) where I was charged with assimilating the two organizations under the CH umbrella. Throughout my tenure as CH CEO, my mantra was “*Better Together*”.