



## OAKLEAF MEDICAL NETWORK WORKING TO HELP SOLVE THE HEALTHCARE CRISIS IN WESTERN WISCONSIN

EAU CLAIRE, WI – Feb 1, 2024 – OakLeaf Medical Network, the largest independent physician association in Western Wisconsin caring for over 30,000 primary care patients, today confirmed that its 300+ medical providers are working together and with community leaders to help solve the looming healthcare crisis in the Chippewa Valley region. This crisis was caused by the news that Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS) hospitals in Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls and its associated Prevea Medical Group clinics in the region will close no later than April 21, 2024.

OakLeaf Medical Network is comprised of 26 clinics that operate across 15 counties in Northwestern and Western Wisconsin, including OakLeaf Clinic's six divisions, Chippewa Valley Orthopedics and Sports Medicine, Western Wisconsin Urology, and Confluence Health (full list below).

"HSHS offered critical healthcare services and hospital beds to the whole region that cannot be absorbed by other hospitals at this time," said Kyle Dettbarn MD, and chair of the board of directors for OakLeaf Medical Network. "Closing these hospitals, emergency rooms, the cancer center, maternity wards, the wound care/hyperbaric clinic, psychiatric and dialysis units will have a dramatic impact on everyone in the western Wisconsin region. Lives will undoubtedly be lost if we cannot all figure out a solution quickly."

Beyond actively participating in community task forces and forums and extending hours and patient capacity, OakLeaf Medical Network physicians are aggressively pursuing other avenues to 1) keep HSHS open and caring for patients in the short term and 2) expand the number of hospital beds in the other hospitals in the region. The network of independent physicians is also working with other community and healthcare leaders on a long-term solution to have enough hospital beds and specialty services available in the growing western Wisconsin region.

### Independent Community Hospital

"Across the country, many municipalities and regions have worked together to build well-run independent community hospitals," added Dr. Dettbarn. "We believe that with the smart, resolute people in the Chippewa Valley, our community can do the same."

Having additional hospital beds and services to complement what the other hospitals in area offer in the region is critical.

"After thorough and careful consideration of the serious healthcare situation, OakLeaf Medical Network reached out to HSHS yesterday with the hopes of entering negotiations to purchase HSHS hospital properties with the intent of creating an independent community hospital. We are optimistic that we can work together to preserve these critical hospital beds and services quickly," stated Dr. Dettbarn.

“Without the number of hospital beds at Sacred Heart and St. Joseph’s hospitals, our region simply does not have enough hospital capacity for our community to grow or thrive.”

In 2023, the City of Eau Claire was the [second fastest growing city](#) in Wisconsin and is now the seventh largest city in Wisconsin, just two years after becoming the eighth largest city in the state.

### Advice To Patients

OakLeaf Medical Network physicians and caregivers are working hard to ensure their patients will have access to the medical services they need.

“We’ve had lots of worried calls from patients confused about all of the news in the last week and a half,” added Dr. Dettbarn. “All of OakLeaf Medical Network Clinics are open and caring for and working diligently to help patients who need specific services – we are here to stay.”

### What Should Patients Do?

1. Confirm with your doctor upcoming appointments.
2. Keep your scheduled medical appointments.
3. If your provider is unable to see you, OakLeaf Medical Network clinics may be able to accommodate new patients with their new extended hours.

### Hospital services that need to be replaced in the region with HSHS closures

- 900+ expected women who are patients of OakLeaf Medical Network doctors will need to find a new hospital to give birth in with HSHS closing its eight labor beds and seven post-partum beds;
- 175+ wound care patients will not have the wound/hyperbaric clinic services required to heal;
- 50+ dialysis patients will need to find new dialysis slots, and capacity at other local dialysis units is limited;
- Over 100 cancer patients will need to find a new treatment home; other cancer care centers in the region are currently operating at or near capacity;
- 20+ inpatient psychiatry hospital beds including the only adolescent unit in the region; and
- many others

### **About OakLeaf Medical Network**

OakLeaf Medical Network is the largest independent physician association in Western Wisconsin, with over 300 medical providers (125 physicians) with 40 specialties working across 26 clinics in 14 counties. Over 30,000 primary care patients are served by OakLeaf Medical Network providers. Originally founded in 1994 by a local group of physicians committed to preserving the unique values of independent medical practices including personal care, continuity of care, and easier access to care, as a “clinic without walls,” the organization has evolved and grown over time.

Today the clinics under the OakLeaf Medical Network include, OakLeaf Clinics (founded in 2015) with its six divisions, Buffalo River Clinic, Chippewa Valley Anesthesia Associates, Chippewa Valley Eye Clinic, Chippewa Valley Eye Clinic Chippewa Falls, Chippewa Valley Neurosciences, Chippewa Valley Orthopedics & Sports Medicine, Confluence Healthcare, DeFatta ENT & Facial Plastic Surgery, Diagnostic Radiology Associates, Eau Claire G.I. Associates, Evergreen Surgical, Foot and Ankle Clinic, Hesse Foot & Ankle

Clinic, Interventional Pain Specialists of Wisconsin, Medical X-Ray Consultants, Merrick Plastic & Hand Surgery, Northwest Radiation Oncology Associates, Nystrom & Associates, Pathology, SC, Plastic Surgery Clinic of Eau Claire, Sunrise Family Care Clinic, Thomas Peller, MD, Western Wisconsin Urology, Winding Rivers Counseling, and Wisconsin Brain & Spine Center. The OakLeaf Surgical Hospital is not a member of the OakLeaf Medical Network.

OakLeaf Medical Network clinics are in the following counties: Barron, Buffalo, Burnett, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Pepin, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, St. Croix, Trempealeau, and Washburn.

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