

# Loretto opens new memory special-care unit

BY ERIC REINHARDT  
ereinhardt@cnybj.com

SYRACUSE — Loretto has opened a new memory special-care unit at Loretto Health & Rehabilitation at 700 E. Brighton Ave. in Syracuse.

The organization said it took this step on Jan. 2 as “the demand for dedicated memory-care services in Central New York has continued to increase, far beyond what our community can currently support.”

With the support of some grant funding, Loretto has invested \$750,000 in renovating an entire floor of its main campus to support the needs of those in the most-advanced stages of dementia.

After nine months of planning followed by three months of construction, the new 12th floor unit will offer 30 individual rooms for long-term, memory-care residents.

The addition of this new unit will allow Loretto to provide dementia care to even more residents while they live “as independently as possible.” Loretto says it has successfully used several of these features over the past three years, since it opened a memory-care unit on the 11th floor of the building, before the pandemic hit in 2019.

Loretto says the unit will use what it describes as an “emerging Montessori care philosophy,” with the unit filled with cues

and memory supports that enable individuals to care for themselves, others, and their community. Staff in this unit will undergo a detailed training program to prepare the team to deliver this Montessori-based approach to specialized care.

Loretto estimates that more than one-third of residents across its system have a diagnosis of dementia and that number is expected to increase. About 410,000 people aged 65 and older are currently living with Alzheimer’s in New York state and that figure is expected to grow by nearly 15 percent by 2025.

Additionally, Loretto recently completed a needs assessment of Central New York’s aging population and created an action plan to address unmet needs. That effort led to the expansion of Loretto’s dedicated memory-care space to meet the increased demand for dementia services.

Loretto describes itself as the fourth-largest health-care provider and the sixth-largest employer in Central New York. The agency has about 2,500 employees at its 19 locations delivering care to close to 10,000 people of all ages, income levels, and care needs in Onondaga and Cayuga counties annually.

## Space design

The memory-care space incorporates technologies and designs “from the most cutting-edge approach to memory care,”



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Loretto opened a new memory special care unit on the 12th floor of Loretto Health & Rehabilitation on Jan. 2. The unit includes music therapy and animatronic pets as part of the Montessori-care philosophy that the lives of memory-care residents can be “enriched through engagement in daily routines and activities.”

Loretto said.

They include elevators, doors, and walls camouflaged with landscapes and familiar home scenes to trigger memories, direct residents, and keep the patients safe.

The space also has a “neighborhood-feel,” complete with unique doors, house numbers and exterior porch lights for each resident’s room to enhance recognition.

It also has a dedicated gathering room to encourage activity-based family visits and other gathering areas that reflect park settings to bring the outside “in,” so residents still feel connected to the outdoors.

In addition, the space has wayfinding cues to make walking more enjoyable, allowing residents a “level of indepen-

dence.”

It also has lighting and window treatments to optimize use of natural light, and sensory stimulation through touch, sounds, and a scent system to help residents feel calm and “remember simple pleasures.”

The space also has special flooring that mitigates fall risk, is gentle on joints, and allows residents to walk safely and comfortably. It also has specialized chairs and recliners to assist in maintaining independence and supporting postural and functional needs.

The new technologies include the It’s Never Too Late (“iN2L”) program, along with animatronic pets, and a dedicated music room. ■



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## Excellus names three new members of senior leadership team

BY JOURNAL STAFF  
news@cnybj.com

UTICA — Excellus BlueCross BlueShield announced it has recently appointed three new members of its senior leadership team.

Mona Chitre was named president of pharmacy solutions in addition to her role as chief pharmacy officer. In her expanded role, she will focus on delivering clinically sound pharmacy solutions to enable growth and diversification and bolster investments and innovation in all areas of the pharmacy landscape. She joined Excellus in 2000. Under Chitre’s leadership, the pharmacy program developed numerous programs to improve the health and well-being of the communities it serves, Excellus contends, including the RxConcierge savings outreach program and initiatives focusing on generic medications, medication adherence, and specialty medications.

Dr. Lisa Harris was appointed senior VP and corporate medical director, where she will work closely with senior leaders to drive engagement, innovation, clinical quality, equitable access, and affordability, the health insurer said. Harris, who

joined Excellus in 2018, will also focus on enabling efficiency and satisfaction. She previously served as VP of medical affairs for commercial lines of business, where she served as a clinical liaison for the commercial side of business and leading the clinical-affordability strategy.

Tony Vitagliano has been named senior VP of provider-network engagement. In this role, he will continue to focus on the health plan’s provider-partnership strategy in addition to leading the areas of payment integrity, medical policy, and risk adjustment. Vitagliano, who joined Excellus in 1993, will also serve as a member of the health plan executive team. He began his career there as an actuarial analyst and held several positions. Mostly recently, he served as VP of provider-network management and operations, where Vitagliano led teams dedicated to provider contracting, provider relations, value-based payments, and reimbursement.

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield is a non-profit health plan with 1.5 million members in upstate New York and more than 4,000 employees. ■



Harris



Chitre



Vitagliano