

Script – Print - Not a Career, a Calling

Personal tragedy spurs new OSF HealthCare Northern Region CEO to her commitment to patient care

Carol Friesen was a 19 year old high school senior when her younger brother was in a hospital intensive care unit (ICU) following a tragic accident.

Between and after classes Friesen and her family spent countless hours in the ICU seeking signs of hope that 13-year old Steven would simply survive his injuries. Then one day a nurse told her Mom "I'm going to do everything I can to make your son comfortable today."

Friesen says seeing the sense of relief those words brought to her Mother set her on a path to bring the same feeling of comfort and reassurance to patients and their families.

"We meet them in their most vulnerable times or stays of their lives and we give them hope," says Carol Friesen, OSF HealthCare Northern Region CEO. "And so, though I didn't think I'd be the person at the bedside, I thought I could certainly be the person who takes care of those at the bedside. I can support them. I can equip them. To make sure they have the tools and resources they need to do the work that we do. And help them bring the Mission to life every day."

That prompted Friesen toward finance and eventually a position as a chief financial officer for a health care center. She has since worked in the field as president and chief executive officer for a medical center, then regional vice-president for a health care system.

She knew about OSF HealthCare long before becoming the CEO of its northern region. But it was after an opportunity to hear Sister Judith Ann, O.S.F., Chairperson of the Boards for OSF HealthCare, speak about the organization's commitment to population health that Friesen saw the OSF Mission as being a good fit for her.

Friesen says Sister explained how people can't access health care unless their most basic needs, like food, shelter, clothing and transportation, are being met. She found the approach alluring and refreshing.

"Because health care can get a little too much like a business, right?," says Carol Friesen, OSF HealthCare Northern Region CEO. "And we always need to remember why it is we do what we do. It's clear to me the Sisters make sure that that's always top of mind here."

Friesen says she's busy learning as much as she can about the OSF HealthCare northern region, a lot of it from OSF Mission Partners.

The knowledge is providing her a perspective about the unique challenges in each of the region's markets - Rockford, Ottawa, Mendota and Streator, IL - as well as Escanaba, MI. But she also is pleased that she has an experienced and dedicated team to help her cast a vision of what the future looks like.

"Leverage our strengths and create a gap in performance - a positive gap in performance," Carol Friesen, OSF HealthCare Northern Region CEO. And then, go back and then figure out what kind of infrastructure we need to put into place to equip us for the long term. So, right now, really identifying the strengths that can be leveraged is our first order of business. And that's all about growth."

Using the sports metaphor, "we need to skate to the puck," Friesen says no matter what changes and challenges await, the OSF Mission of "serving with the greatest care and love", will always be the main motivation.

"We may be on this path today and we may have to pivot," says Carol Friesen, OSF HealthCare Northern Region CEO. "And that, I think, you know, should be not a maybe, but it will be a for sure. How often we'll have to pivot, how agile we will become - that will be key to our success. And so, I think, and listening, right? So, how can we serve with the greatest care and love is to know what it is our patient's needs, our community needs. And so listening to that will always make us more contemporary. Sometimes health care we get busy delivering health care and that can be a fault."