To quote Tom Hanks, “It’s like coming home, but to no home I’ve ever been before.” I have found that the time away from Lake Chelan was good for my mind, as well as my heart, and now I’m happier than ever to be back home.

I have now assumed a new role in the medical community, that of Chief Medical Officer at Lake Chelan Community Hospital (LCCH). My duties will include being medical director of the emergency department and Emergency Medical Services, as well as a link between the medical staff and hospital services, including laboratory, diagnostic imaging and administration.

I will continue to practice medicine by taking shifts in the hospital emergency room and doing patient treadmills and colon cancer screenings, as well as being on site to assist in any emergent cases in our surgical unit, emergency room and childbirth center.

David Bernier, LCCH CEO, and the hospital board of commissioners extended this offer and have outlined an ambitious agenda. I am grateful for their trust in me and for affording me this opportunity to meet the medical needs of the citizens of our beautiful area.

I am also grateful to Mercy Medical Center in Nampa, Idaho for the exceptional experience I had working for them. I hope to bring some of the positives from my time with their organization back to ours. They were most gracious and understanding when I asked to return to Lake Chelan.

I am honored to return to Lake Chelan’s hospital to serve the medical needs of our community.
It’s February, and most rational people are frantic for excuses to weasel out of well-intentioned resolutions made on New Year’s Day. While a truly inspired excuse may soothe your guilt, it’s certainly not going to help your health. It’s not too late to get back in gear and start making healthy choices. The facts are clear.

If you don’t exercise, you will get weak. Your bones will turn to chalk, and you’ll gain weight. If you gain weight, your blood pressure will likely go up, and you will be much more likely to get diabetes - or to make your diabetes worse. If you sit and watch the tube all day, your mind turns to mush. If you eat a high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt diet, your body will eventually crash and burn. And don’t get me started on smoking. Ah, I can’t resist.

Quit Smoking! Some things are more important than others when it comes to improving your health, so work on the most important things first. If you smoke, stop. It’s your number one health priority. Smoking is the worst thing you can do for your health, with the possible exception of playing Russian Roulette on a regular basis. Quitting smoking may not be easy, but it can be done. There are medicines that make it easier. Yes, newer medicines are expensive, but they are cheaper than smoking a pack a day. If you are interested in quitting, please talk to your doctor. Any doctor worth his salt will do whatever it takes to help you.

Maintain a proper weight. Maintaining a proper weight is crucial. In my opinion, losing weight and keeping it off is one of the hardest things to do. This is especially so with the abundance of available food. I think losing weight and staying at a healthy weight are the result of a lot of healthy habits, rather than an end, in and of itself. Beyond the obvious of eating fewer calories and exercising more, there are some things associated with excess weight that are relatively easy to change.

Let’s get cooking. There is a strong association between excess weight and how frequently you eat out, as well as how much prepackaged processed food you eat. Preparing meals at home from a variety of basic ingredients is best. I don’t think you need to do the Little Red Hen thing and grow, harvest and grind your own wheat to make bread, but on the other hand, popping a frozen pizza in the oven does not count as a homemade meal.

Get enough sleep. Studies show that regularly sleeping less than six hours a night is a definite risk factor for being overweight. This could be from not enough time for a good night’s sleep or a medical condition like sleep apnea. If you think you have a sleep problem, see your doctor. In any case, a good night’s sleep rocks.

Enjoy your meals. There is also great benefit to eating your meals more slowly. Chew a little bit, drink a little bit, talk and laugh with your family and give your body a chance to feel full. And all this is without counting a single calorie.

Regular exercise will deliver you from many evils. If I were king, I would decree that everyone start each day at 6 AM with one hour of aerobic exercise followed by 30 minutes of calisthenics. The likelihood of me pulling a sword out of a stone any time soon seems remote, however, so let’s start small. If you are an Olympic quality couch potato, please start somewhere. Even a five minute walk a day is good, but the more the better, up to 30 minutes five days a week. Get good walking or running shoes from your local sporting goods store and get going. If walking is something you can’t do, then riding a bike or stationary bike is good. If you are going to use exercise equipment, studies show the best type is a motorized treadmill. What is important is not what you do - but doing SOMETHING regularly at least five days a week. Staying in shape is a good idea, and round is not the shape I have in mind. All of these things will lessen your chance of having a heart attack; what we most likely will die from.

Keep your brain active. Let’s not forget about Alzheimer’s disease. Other than your basic healthy lifestyle, which is good for anything that ails you, there is some information suggesting that staying mentally active can forestall this increasingly common disease. Things like working brain teaser puzzles, learning a new skill, like playing an instrument or learning a new language, will at least help keep your mind sharp as time and gravity take their toll on everything else.
It’s hard to believe a year has passed since I arrived full of enthusiasm in January 2008. It is a great privilege to work with such dedicated professionals. After being in a leadership position at eight hospitals around the world, I can sincerely say that your well-trained staff at Lake Chelan Community Hospital (LCCH) is truly the best of the best. We are your community hospital, and we work for you.

We’re also proud of our collaboration with fire districts in Chelan and Manson. Placing an ambulance at both locations has saved an average of 4.9 minutes on our response time and helped us continue to bring you lifesaving care.

As a rural hospital, LCCH is a vital part of a healthcare network that extends throughout the state and beyond. Rural hospitals play a key role in trauma care, diagnosis and rehabilitative care that complements the services of major medical centers.

We continue to partner with specialty referral hospitals and enhance our Tele-Medicine network at Swedish Medical Center, Harborview and Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, as well as Sacred Heart Medical Center and Deaconess Hospital in Spokane. Tele-Medicine links real-time specialists with our state-of-the-art video technology and often allows patients to remain in our hospital instead of being displaced to Seattle or Spokane.

As part of the North Central Washington Regional Health Network, we are linked to a myriad of specialists from Wenatchee to Tonasket. We collaborate and play an important role in the continuum of care our residents need. Once a month, the regional administrators, including myself, meet and roll up our sleeves to strengthen the medical capabilities in North Central Washington. We’ve purchased equipment together, shared resources and collectively applied for grant opportunities to bring federal and state dollars to our region.

Our patients consistently rate us high for the personalized care we provide. We’re doing great things, and we’re proud of our accomplishments. Please stop by and visit us!

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Reflecting back - looking forward

The year 2008 was one of great progress for Lake Chelan Community Hospital (LCCH). In January, the Commissioners hired David Bernier, who presented the right array of skills, experience and vision to lead our hospital. Our choice has proven to be the right one as we have progressed financially, in our quality assurance system and in building a cohesive hospital team. Nominated by Modern Healthcare’s “Best Places to Work in Healthcare,” the hospital placed in the top 3% nationally.

One of the first charges Commissioners gave Bernier was to implement programs to enhance the patient/family experience by focusing on greater choice, patient engagement and respect. The latest program improvement was room service dining, which has been highly praised by patients. We funded more training for your hospital staff to help them focus care in a more patient-centered environment. We have encouraged them to reach out to valley residents through wellness programs. Much of the emphasis right now is on wellness education, as you can see from articles in previous newsletters on topics such as diabetes management, stress control and preventing infection. Your hospital staff is also working with local school districts to help teach the MedClub class and provide CPR training to students and their families.

By early February, the Commissioners will finalize our strategic plan process, and we will let you know what we have on our agenda regarding enhancements to our community outreach programs, patient-centered care and patient care technology. Please feel free to call a Commissioner if you have a question or concern. We invite you to visit and tour your hospital. Call Administrator Bernier at 682-6100, and he’ll gladly show you the facility. You’ll be happy you did!

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Did you know?

Thanks in part to a generous donation by the Chelan Rotary, your community hospital’s Emergency Medical Services Department will bring the CPR Plus Program to forty fifth graders at Manson Elementary School. Each student will receive instruction and a CPR personal training kit, including an inflatable CPR manikin and practice DVD.

If each of those fifth graders takes his or her training kit home and shares core CPR skills with two family members, at least 120 people will learn valuable skills that could someday save a life.

Are you interested in learning CPR or First Aid? We offer a full schedule of classes. View the 2009 schedule at: www.lakechelanhospital.com

Classes are offered weekday evenings and Saturdays. Call 682-6102 for more information.

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Bringing positive results of collaboration to Lake Chelan

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New ultrasound improves emergency medical care
by Ed Swensen, MS, PA-C

Changes in medicine and patient care occur constantly, and our job as healthcare providers is to continuously study and keep up with these changes and new standards of care.

In emergency medicine, a new emerging standard is the use of bedside or emergency ultrasound. Have you ever come to your community hospital to be told, “We need to schedule you tomorrow or send you to Wenatchee tonight for an ultrasound?” That may now be all in the past.

I’m excited to share that Lake Chelan Community Hospital (LCCH) has purchased a new state-of-the-art bedside ultrasound machine and is implementing this standard into our emergency medicine department.

I recently returned from a two-week comprehensive medical education seminar that focused on emergency medicine and critical care ultrasound. I learned many new skills and techniques that will raise our emergency medical care to a new level.

Emergency ultrasound is the medical use of ultrasound technology for the bedside diagnostic evaluation of emergency medical conditions and diagnoses, as well as the resuscitation of the acutely or critically ill or injured. The information we get from emergency ultrasounds guides us in high risk or difficult procedures, helps us monitor certain pathologic states and adds to medical therapy you may need. It can also help us access difficult-to-find veins.

At LCCH, your emergency ultrasound examinations will be performed and interpreted by specially trained emergency physicians, mid-level providers, surgeons and sonographers in our emergency department.

With our new equipment, we can perform quick, focused ultrasound examinations to answer important clinical questions about life-threatening situations. It helps us, your emergency medical care team, give you the high quality care you need.

These emergency type ultrasounds use a different philosophy than traditional ultrasound exams in our hospital’s radiology department. They shouldn’t be confused with those more-thorough exams performed by our registered sonographers.

The difference is that emergency ultrasound is performed, interpreted and integrated in an immediate and rapid manner. It can be applied to any emergency medical condition, in any setting.

The use of ultrasound in Emergency Medicine has greatly increased over the last several years. Emergency medicine providers have embraced it as an efficient way to evaluate patients with a variety of clinical problems.

The use of emergency ultrasound is now widespread at hospitals, as the increasing emphasis on patient safety, less invasive treatment and non-radiation imaging has found a natural fit with advantages of ultrasound. Emergency medicine has become the leading non-traditional clinical specialty integrating ultrasound. Emergency ultrasound applications include:

- Trauma
- Pregnancy Complications
- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm
- Emergency Echocardiography
- Hepatobiliary and Urinary Tract
- Deep Venous Thrombosis
- Soft-tissue/musculoskeletal
- Thoracic Disorder Detection
- Ocular Evaluations
- Procedural Guidance

Advances in technology have led to smaller, more portable and easier to use machines with increasingly better image quality. We are excited to bring one of these machines to our hospital’s emergency medical department.