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# WORKING TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM

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## LORI SHIBINETTE '13 TAKES ON MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

BY JOHN SHAW PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW CUNNINGHAM

**T**he opioid and heroin epidemics have been front-page news in New Hampshire for the past several years. But there's another health crisis that has proven to be a major challenge for the state, one that 2013 Franklin Pierce University graduate Lori Shibinette is tackling head-on.

As the new CEO of New Hampshire Hospital, the state's largest public mental health facility, Shibinette is charged with repairing a system that has fallen on hard times in recent years. "It's a big problem that's not going to change overnight," said Shibinette, who earned her online MBA from Pierce's College of Graduate and Professional Studies. "This has been an issue for some time, and we're committed to getting things right again."



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey blazer over a white top and a pearl necklace, stands in a hospital hallway. She is smiling slightly and has her hands clasped in front of her. The background shows a modern hospital interior with large windows, a glass railing, and bulletin boards on the wall.

Lori Shabinette '13  
at New Hampshire  
Hospital.



“Nursing opened the door for me and developed my passion for serving the poor, the mentally ill and the elderly. But it was getting my MBA that has allowed me to really understand how to read financial documents and get a deep understanding of how to best implement the principals of evidence-based practice.”

To do so, she will have to tackle a mental health infrastructure beset with myriad issues. Long wait times for admittance to the 168-bed psychiatric hospital, along with the closing of several regional facilities and an overall shortage of qualified staff, have created a ripple effect in which emergency rooms at many of the state's traditional hospitals have turned into de facto mental health clinics. This, in turn, has created a backlog that can delay treatment for patients needing other emergent care.

Shibinette noted a recent day in which there were 70 patients waiting to be discharged, delaying admittance for 32 people who needed to be admitted. While additional beds would help, she said, it's more effective to discharge patients more quickly to transitional housing or other community care facilities. So one of her first steps is working to reestablish relationships with other public and private facilities that can play a major role in improving the situation.

“New Hampshire has a chronic mental health problem, and we are the only psychiatric hospital in the state that takes involuntary admissions,” she said. “We impact every facility in the state so it's imperative that we work together more effectively to deal with this problem and make sure everyone who needs assistance receives it.”

Having spent several years as CEO of the 290-bed Merrimack County Nursing Home that includes an assisted living facility with more than 500 employees, Shibinette knows the provider side of health care quite well. In 2016,

she was named deputy commissioner at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), where she was part of the department's executive management team. Among her duties was overseeing New Hampshire Hospital and Glencliff Home, a state-run, long-term care facility, as well as implementing several recommendations from an independent sentinel review panel.

The role was short lived. Less than a year later, DHHS commissioner Jeffrey Meyers appointed her to take over the psychiatric hospital after the sudden departure of the previous chief executive officer.

“Although I was truly enjoying my role as deputy commissioner, both the commissioner and I knew that I had the private and public experience needed for the chief executive position,” said Shibinette, adding that she sees her role as more operational versus political. “We both knew that this was in my wheelhouse.”

“After a national search, it was apparent that Lori is uniquely suited to the position due to her experience in health care management, policy and innovation, as well as her clinical background,” Meyers said in a statement to the press.

“While Lori has successfully led several important initiatives in her time as deputy commissioner, she is the best candidate for this role,” he added, “I have every confidence that she will bring her extensive skills to the CEO position at New Hampshire Hospital to continue to address pressing mental health needs.”







Shibinette returns to the psychiatric hospital where she began her career in 1995, having moved to the United States from her native Nova Scotia after earning a nursing diploma from the Cape Breton Regional Hospital School of Nursing. She worked as a nurse at NHH for two years, and then became director of nursing services at St. Francis Nursing Home in Laconia, N.H. That's when she discovered it was in administration where she could make the biggest impact with patient care. She would go on to earn a B.S. in nursing, but she realized that she needed a better grasp of the business side of things.

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That Shibinette has taken on such an important role comes as no surprise to Dr. Michael Mooiman, associate professor of business in the College of Business at the University. He remembers her being completely engaged in the finance course he has taught for the past several years.

"I've been very impressed with what she's done with her career," he said, noting that they have stayed in touch since Shibinette graduated. "She has an amazing capacity for hard work and being able to make difficult decisions, and that's what makes her a great leader."

Shibinette pointed to the focus on leadership that is woven into the fabric of the MBA program, skills that she is using as she puts together a new executive team that can help her turn things around. The work will include a comprehensive assessment of the hospital's procedures and policies, dealing with Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, tackling its \$50 million budget, working with the 600 employees — some of whom she remembers from her early days — and creating its first master plan. In addition, she will investigate a recent growth in incidents where patients have injured health care workers.

Once things have stabilized at the hospital, she plans to return to FPU as an adjunct faculty member, something she has done since graduation. "I love teaching at Franklin Pierce, especially to adult learners taking undergraduate courses — they are so eager to learn," she said. "It's a great place to teach." 