

## Children's Hospital switching to old name, creating Valley health network

By Barbara Anderson



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MADERA — The name is old but new again at Valley Children's Hospital, the crayon-colored hospital overlooking the San Joaquin River in Madera County.

Children's Hospital Central California is reverting to its original name, officials announced Wednesday to loud applause at an event that also disclosed a new partnership with Stanford Children's Health.

The rollout of the Valley Children's brand will begin in early 2015. But the [hospital's website](#) already carries the new identification.

"We're returning to our cherished and trusted name of Valley Children's Hospital," President and CEO Todd Suntrapak said.

Taking back the name pleases registered nurse Rachel Hernandez. "No one ever really adopted" Children's Hospital Central California when it was renamed in 2002, she said. "It kind of feels more like we're going back to our roots."

At the same time, the hospital is moving forward to create a broad network of pediatric care in the San Joaquin Valley.

"We're enhancing our presence in the Valley," Suntrapak said of the network, which will be known as Valley Children's

Healthcare. The network should improve access so that families and patients won't have to travel more than 30 minutes to receive care, he said, and will include the hospital, medical foundation, doctor groups, clinics and satellite facilities around the region.

Children's already operates a neonatal intensive care unit at Saint Agnes Medical Center in Fresno, as well as at hospitals in Hanford and Merced. Outpatient doctors' offices are located in Modesto and Merced, and by the beginning of the year an office will open in Bakersfield.

In October, [Children's announced a \\$10 million deal with Adventist Health/Central Valley Network](#) to build a new medical plaza in Fowler specializing in pediatric care, among other services. The two nonprofit organizations bought equal shares of a 16-acre parcel of property on Highway 99 for a pediatric and adult care building.

The association with Stanford is a partnership, not a merger, Suntrapak said. The two organizations have developed clinical relationships over the years, including in pediatric heart surgery. They also collaborate on care for patients needing organ and bone marrow transplants.

The new partnership will expand on those relationships, Suntrapak said. By working together, they can have better outcomes for patients and improve efficiency, he said.

No one from Stanford attended Wednesday's event, but Christopher Dawes, president and CEO of [Stanford Children's Health and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford](#), said in a written statement: "Both Valley Children's and Stanford Children's Health share a longstanding commitment to deliver the highest quality pediatric care, and we look forward to continue working with their exceptional physicians, nurses and staff to expand access to children and their families across the region."

"We're reinvesting in the Valley that we have been a part of for more than 60 years," Suntrapak told the crowd gathered Wednesday at the hospital.

The announcement comes as [Children's and its affiliated Specialty Medical Group](#) of physicians have come under criticism for ending their contracts with Santé Community Physicians, the largest independent physician's association associated with Community Medical Centers.

Community Medical not surprised

Children's partnership with Stanford didn't surprise Community Medical Centers officials, who said last month they are going toe-to-toe with Children's for pediatric patients in the Valley.

"The announcement by Children's Hospital was short on specifics, but obviously they've been negotiating with other parties for quite some time," said John Zelezny, senior vice president for communications. And the partnership "doesn't change our need to expand women's and children's services at Community," he said.

About 60% of Fresno County's babies are born at Community Medical Centers, and Community is the region's provider of burn and trauma care for children, Zelezny said. "We must grow these service lines and expand access in downtown Fresno. Plans for a dedicated women's and children's facility are being crafted now."

News that the hospital would retake the Valley Children's name does not mean the hospital is retrenching from a goal it set in 2002 when it became Children's Hospital Central California, said hospital spokeswoman Zara Arboleda.

At that time, hospital officials said the name change reflected the goal of marketing its specialty services to doctors and patients throughout the western United States.

"That goal has NOT been abandoned," Arboleda wrote in an email. "The name changed 12 years ago, in part, to help recruit physicians from outside our region. The strategy worked, and some of the best pediatric specialists have come to Valley Children's. We're confident that people know who we are and where we are around the country, so the

timing is perfect for returning to the name people know and trust.”

Suntrapak told Wednesday’s crowd: “In my heart, I’ve always known it was Valley Children’s.”

Suntrapak, who was named president and CEO in July 2012, has a long history with the hospital, starting with his first job in 1995 and a long stint as chief operating officer and later as executive vice president and chief operating officer.

Reclaiming the moniker of Valley Children’s Hospital is “really honoring the families we have served,” Suntrapak said.

It’s not known how much it will cost to rebrand the hospital, but supplies with the Children’s Hospital Central California brand will be exhausted before new ones are ordered as Valley Children’s Hospital, Arboleda said.

It shouldn’t be a difficult transition for the community.

Most people never knew the name changed.

“I’ve always called it Valley Children’s Hospital,” Payling Scott, 45, of Atwater, said while taking her daughter for an appointment Wednesday.

Besides, the hospital name is inconsequential, said Mahesh Kundal, a Bakersfield parent taking his son to see a doctor. “The name doesn’t matter — as long as the services stay the same.”

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