

ECU, Vidant Health to clinically integrate, create ECU-branded academic health system

- *Dr. Michael Waldrum appointed dean of ECU's Brody School of Medicine*
- *Dr. Jason Higginson named executive dean of Brody School of Medicine*

Greenville, N.C. (June 23, 2021) – East Carolina University will move toward full clinical integration with Vidant Health and the creation of a distinctive health system brand – ECU Health or similar branding – to serve the 1.4 million residents of eastern North Carolina, Chancellor Philip Rogers announced today.

As part of executing the vision for a clinically integrated and rebranded academic health system, Rogers has appointed Dr. Michael Waldrum, chief executive officer of Vidant Health, as the seventh dean of the Brody School of Medicine at ECU. The appointment is effective July 1, 2021.

Waldrum will continue to serve as CEO of Vidant Health. In his role as dean, Waldrum will report directly to the chancellor.

“This is an exciting day for our university and for the people of eastern North Carolina,” Rogers said. “By aligning the leadership of the Brody School of Medicine and Vidant Health, we will be able to more effectively train future physicians, provide enhanced research opportunities, advance technological solutions and better coordinate the delivery of health care to the people of our region.”

This is the first step toward a shared goal of increasing collaboration and integrating Vidant Health and the Brody School of Medicine. The two organizations will work together with academic and clinical leadership to transform together, to build on combined strengths, and to create a regional health care, research and educational enterprise.

The dual appointment for Waldrum, which was approved by the ECU Board of Trustees today and endorsed by the Vidant Health board, further strengthens the long-standing affiliation between the two institutions and their shared mission to provide high-quality, compassionate care to eastern North Carolina while training the next generation of physicians to do the same.

In his role as dean, Waldrum will be the senior academic and administrative officer for the Brody School of Medicine and will be responsible for the academic and research programs.

Also, Dr. Jason Higginson has been appointed as executive dean of the Brody School of Medicine; he is currently serving as interim dean. Higginson will be primarily responsible for the operational aspects of all medical school activities. He will provide senior executive management of personnel and operations within ECU Physicians, the clinical practice of the Brody School of Medicine, and serve as a liaison between department chairs and the dean. He will also serve as the chief administrative officer of ECU Physicians for clinical areas and various transactions.

“Dr. Waldrum and Dr. Higginson are the right leaders at this pivotal moment in Brody’s history. They will work collaboratively to ensure we design a strategically aligned and clinically integrated academic health system for our region that proudly leverages the ECU brand,” Rogers said. “Today, there is no transfer of assets or change in anyone’s employment status. Instead, this decision represents a step toward realizing our full potential together in providing access to advanced care for all of eastern North Carolina through ECU Health or a similarly branded academic health system.”

Waldrum has served as CEO of Vidant since June 2015 and is a distinguished professor at the Brody School of Medicine. He currently serves on the board of the Association of Medical Colleges and is chair-elect of the Council of Teaching Hospitals and Health Systems of the Association of Medical Colleges.

“It is an honor to lead the Brody School of Medicine, which is one of the premier academic health institutions in the nation,” Waldrum said. “I want to thank Chancellor Rogers for this opportunity and look forward to working together on behalf of those we serve. There is no doubt in my mind that Greenville and eastern North Carolina benefit from close partnership between Vidant and ECU. Together, these two institutions can continue to innovate and work collaboratively on meeting the shared goal of providing high-quality health care for the region.”

Before leading Vidant, Waldrum served as president and CEO of The University of Arizona Health Network, where he had oversight of the academic health care organization. Prior to that, he served as CEO of the University of Alabama Hospital at Birmingham (UAB) and vice president of UAB Health.

Waldrum is trained in critical care medicine, pulmonology and internal medicine. He received a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of The South at Sewanee in Tennessee and his medical degree from the UAB School of Medicine. He completed his residency at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, received a master’s degree in epidemiology from the Harvard School of Public Health and earned an MBA from the University of Michigan.

Since joining Brody in 2012, Higginson has served as chief of neonatology for the Department of Pediatrics, medical director for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Newborn Medicine, and the pediatrician-in-chief for the James and Connie Maynard Children’s Hospital at Vidant Medical Center. He also previously served as chair of the Department of Pediatrics from 2016 until his appointment as interim dean.

Higginson also holds the rank of captain in the U.S. Navy Reserves, which he joined in 2012 after 13 years of active duty; he recently returned to ECU after a 12-month active-duty deployment.

“I was drawn to the Brody School of Medicine because of its mission and commitment to providing cutting-edge, compassionate care for people of eastern North Carolina, some of whom are often on the margins of society,” Higginson said. “I look forward to working with Chancellor Rogers and Dr. Waldrum in the coming years to build upon the solid foundation we have to improve the health care for all in our region.”

UNC System President Peter Hans said of today’s announcement: “This begins to place ECU and Vidant into closer organizational alignment, so the mission remains the priority – serving the health care needs of eastern North Carolina, rural areas of our state, and beyond. Chancellor Rogers’ selection of Dr. Waldrum and Dr. Higginson demonstrates that they all realize the most strategic and productive way forward is working more closely together.”

Chancellor Rogers said much work will be needed in the future to make today's announcement a reality. "Boldly, we will move forward together with a shared vision and set of values. We believe this is the most innovative, long-term and strategic solution to serve our region, and if we keep our joint mission at the center of this work, then we will look back on today's announcement as a milestone in our university's history," he said.

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About East Carolina University

East Carolina University, or ECU as it's best known, offers more than 87 bachelor's, 68 master's and 18 doctoral degrees to nearly 29,000 students on its Greenville, North Carolina, campus and through an acclaimed online learning program. ECU also boasts the largest business school enrollment and largest number of new nurses and education professionals produced by a four-year North Carolina university, in addition to the largest studio art program in the state. Located near Atlantic coast harbors where pirates once roamed, ECU adopted the "Pirates" mascot in 1934 for its athletics program and competes in NCAA Division I. Visit: www.ecu.edu.

The Brody School of Medicine at ECU was founded more than 40 years ago to increase the supply of primary care physicians serving North Carolina, improve the health status of eastern North Carolina and enhance access of minority and disadvantaged students to a medical education. Each year, the school graduates close to 86 medical students and welcomes about 125 residents and fellows. Nearly half of Brody's more than 2,400 graduates practice in N.C., many in rural and underserved areas. Brody consistently ranks in the Top 10% of U.S. medical schools for graduating physicians who practice in-state, practice primary care and practice in rural and underserved areas.

About Vidant Health

Vidant Health is a mission-driven, 1,708-bed health system that annually serves more than 1.4 million people in 29 eastern North Carolina counties. The not-for-profit system is made up of more than 13,000 employees, nine hospitals, home health, hospice, wellness centers, and Vidant Medical Group, a multi-specialty physician and provider group with more than 500 providers in more than 90 locations in eastern North Carolina. Vidant is affiliated with The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University. As a major resource for health services and education, Vidant has a mission to improve the health and well-being of eastern North Carolina. For more information, visit vidanthealth.com.