



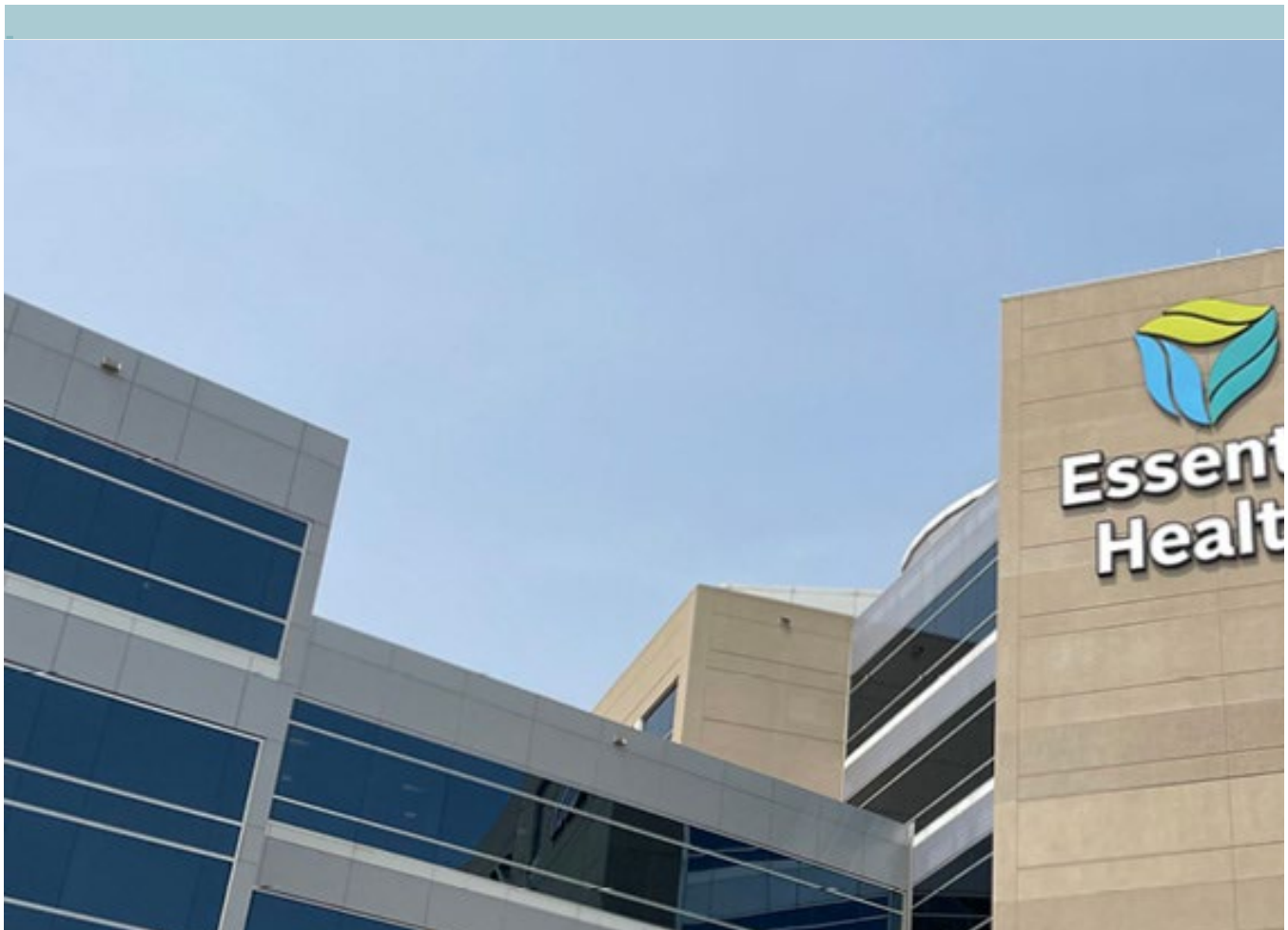
**Essentia Health**

**Executive Vice President of Operations and  
Administration, Chief Operating Officer**

Leadership Profile

February 2026

*Prepared by Jim King III, Keshia Harris, and Molly Solomon*



**WittKieffer**

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## The Opportunity

Essentia Health seeks a collaborative, results-driven executive to serve as the health system's next Executive Vice President of Operations and Administration, Chief Operating Officer (COO). Headquartered in Duluth, MN, Essentia Health is a \$3 billion nonprofit integrated health system serving patients in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. The health system combines the strengths and talents of over 16,000 employees, including more than 2,400 physicians and advanced practitioners, who serve its patients and communities through the mission of being called to make a healthy difference in people's lives. The health system is comprised of 14 hospitals, 80 clinics, six long-term care facilities, five assisted living and independent living facilities, seven ambulance services, 29 retail pharmacies, and one research institute.

Reporting directly to the health system's Chief Executive Officer, David Herman, M.D., the COO will be a key member of the executive leadership team with oversight of a diverse portfolio including operations, ancillary and support services, human resources, information technology, population health, strategy and business development, marketing and communications, care delivery, and digital health. The COO will work in a true dyad leadership model ensuring disciplined operational excellence, advancing a culture of accountability across the system, and leading a complex, multi-site organization that spans urban, suburban, and highly rural settings. The COO will serve in a highly visible, enterprise-wide role focused on strengthening operating rigor, improving financial performance, and ensuring the health system continues to build on its strong foundation.

A key priority for the COO will be advancing the organization's shift from volume to value by leading the redesign of the practice and operating model. The COO will transform care delivery across Essentia Health by anticipating future trends and ensuring a continued focus on improving cost per unit of service, patient outcomes, and long-term financial sustainability. The COO will work across the health system's markets to drive alignment by reducing operational variation and improving performance. This executive will play a key role in further advancing quality, safety, and patient experience. It is expected that the COO be a visible leader across Essentia Health's service area.

The ideal candidate will be a seasoned operational leader with a proven track record of leading operational success in a complex, multi-site health system. The COO will be a forward-thinking leader who also has deep experience with daily operational management of a large enterprise. They will need to be a natural collaborator with demonstrated strong relationships with clinical and executive teams driven to achieve results with pace and decisiveness. The COO must be emotionally intelligent and comfortable engaging at all levels of the organization to include the Board of Directors. They will work in a collaborative and proactive manner with the CEO and other members of the executive team to improve and sustain operational performance and attain strategic goals and objectives. The COO will be a change agent with a strong track record of success driving improved operational, clinical, and financial performance. They will have a balanced approach to leadership between strategy and operations.

Essentia Health prefers that the selected candidate reside in Duluth, MN; however, hybrid arrangements may be considered for exceptionally qualified candidates.

## Organization Overview

Headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota, Essentia Health is a physician-led, nonprofit integrated health system with locations across Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. Formed in 2004 through a partnership of the Benedictine Health System and the SMDC Health System, Essentia has since grown into a consolidation of regional hospital systems and large, multi-specialty physician groups. It continues to operate as a secular organization with several Catholic facilities, maintaining a mission-driven and values-oriented care philosophy. Essentia provides convenient, close-to-home access to a comprehensive range of services across urban and rural settings, including acute care hospitals, primary and specialty clinics, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care and assisted living, pharmacies, imaging, in-home care, and a broad portfolio of inpatient, outpatient, emergency, telehealth, and retail health services.

The health system is comprised of 16,247 employees, including more than 2,400 physicians and advanced practice providers. As of June 30, 2025, Essentia operates 14 hospitals, 80 clinics, six long-term care facilities, five assisted and independent living facilities, seven ambulance services, 29 retail pharmacies, two surgery centers, 11 rehabilitation and fitness centers, and one research & education institute. In the last fiscal year, Essentia had almost 40,900 hospital patient discharges, and 2.3 million patient encounters for a reported total revenue of \$3.28 billion. Across its geographic footprint, Essentia collaborates with community-based health care organizations, allowing local and regional identity to be preserved and supported by the knowledge, experience and resources of a strong, values-oriented organization.

Essentia collaborates with community-based health organizations throughout its tri-state service region, preserving local identity while leveraging the resources, infrastructure, and expertise of a large integrated health system. The organization is nationally recognized for its high-quality care, value-based care leadership, rural-health innovation, and advanced technology infrastructure.

To best serve its growing and geographically diverse patient population, Essentia is structured into two markets representing its western and eastern service areas. This design balances systemwide strategy with local operational oversight. Each market is anchored by a tertiary care center, St. Mary’s Medical Center in Duluth for the East Market and Essentia Health–Fargo for the West Market, supported by regional referral centers and a broad ambulatory network that ensures coordinated, accessible, and high-quality care across the Upper Midwest.

Essentia Health at a glance*	
14 Hospitals;	16,247 Employees
2 Surgery centers;	2,044,829 Clinic encounters
5 Assisted & independent living;	49,220 Surgeries
80 Clinics	165,634 ER visits
6 Long-term care	40,896 Discharges
11 Rehab & fitness;	215,455 Patient days
7 Ambulance services	4,076 Births
1 Research & education institute	173,371 Telehealth visits

\*FY25 statistics July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025

## Key Financial Data

<b>Financial Data: Most Recent Completed FYE 6/30/25</b>	
<b>(Dollars in Thousands)</b>	
<b>Revenue</b>	
<b>Net Patient Revenue</b>	\$3,179,746
<b>Other Revenue</b>	\$104,180
<b>Total Revenue</b>	\$3,283,926
<b>Expenses</b>	
<b>Salary and Benefits</b>	\$1,904,015
<b>Supplies, Pro Fees &amp; Other</b>	\$1,185,238
<b>Depreciation &amp; Amortization</b>	\$123,044
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	\$3,212,297
<b>Net Income on Operations</b>	\$71,629
<b>Operating Data</b>	
<b>Patient Beds (Licensed/Operating)</b>	1,202 licensed/978 operating
<b>Average Daily Census</b>	590.3
<b>Patient Days</b>	215,455
<b>ALOS (Medicare/Hospital Wide)</b>	5.3 days
<b>Births</b>	4,076
<b>Total Surgeries</b>	49,220
<b>Outpatient Visits (non-ER)</b>	830,573
<b>ER Visits</b>	165,634

<b>Total FTEs</b>	12,599
<b>Case Mix Index (all patients)</b>	1.92 Medicare / 1.54 All Patients
<b>FTEs/AOB</b>	4.82 FTE/AOB
<b>Other Data</b>	
<b>Payer Mix (Gross Charges)</b>	
<b>Medicare Traditional &amp; Managed</b>	46%
<b>Medicaid Traditional &amp; Managed</b>	14%
<b>Commercial/Other Managed Care</b>	31%
<b>Self-Pay and Other</b>	9%
<b>Percentage IP Business (gross rev)</b>	23%
<b>Percentage OP Business (gross rev)</b>	77%
<b>Balance Sheet</b>	
<b>Long-Term Debt</b>	\$1,258,200
<b>Days Cash on Hand</b>	204.5
<b>Net Days in AR</b>	34.0
<b>Bond Rating</b>	A-, Positive Outlook for both S&P and Fitch. Last ratings Fall 2025

## Mission and Values

Coming together gives us greater resources to achieve our mission and vision while strengthening our core values. Our mission, values and belief statements are the foundation of our promise to the patients, families, and communities we serve.

### Mission

We are called to make a healthy difference in people's lives.

### Values

- Quality
- Hospitality
- Respect
- Joy
- Justice
- Stewardship
- Teamwork

### Belief Statements

- Our highest priority is the people we serve.
- We believe that the highest quality health care requires a regard for both the soul and science of healing and a focus on continuous improvement.
- We believe in the synergy of sponsorship among faith-based and secular organizations.
- We believe in the value of integrated health care services.
- We believe in having a meaningful presence in the communities we serve.

Within Essentia Health there are many Catholic facilities. Essentia Health's mission—as well as its people, places and care—is enhanced by its Catholic Mission.

To learn more about Essentia Health, please visit

<https://www.essentiahealth.org/>.

## Position Summary

The COO will direct all clinical and support-related operational activities and ensure Essentia Health has the proper operational controls, performance measures, administrative and reporting procedures and people systems in place to support the business and its future. The COO has responsibility for the patient experience throughout the entire system and leads a management team to deliver measurable, cost-effective results that make achieving organizational goals possible.

### Reporting Relationships

The COO reports directly to Essentia Health's Chief Executive Officer, David Herman, M.D. Direct reports to the COO include the following:

- Essentia Health-West Chief Operations Officer
- Essential Health-East Chief Operations Officer
- Chief Human Resources Officer
- Chief Information Officer
- Sr. Vice President Population Health
- Sr. Vice President Clinical & Support Services
- Sr. Vice President Strategy & Business Development
- Vice President Marketing & Communications
- Vice President Integrated Care Delivery
- Vice President Digital Health

### Responsibilities

The successful candidate will:

- Assume operational responsibility to deliver overall health system financial performance, operational efficiency, quality and safety, and market share while maintaining the highest level of care.
- Provide operational leadership and directly manages hospital operations, ancillary and support service operations, human resources, information technology, population health, strategy and business development, marketing and communications care delivery, and digital health.
- Ensure the effective delivery of integrated care across the continuum to ensure access, coordination, and affordability for those served.
- Assess overall health system operations while ensuring that Essentia Health provides high-quality, cost-effective care, while maintaining patient satisfaction, employee engagement, and provider satisfaction at the highest level.
- Work closely with the CEO to develop and accomplish short and long-term goals and strategic priorities.
- Initiate and support process improvements and waste reduction initiatives.
- Partner closely with the CFO in all operational contracting issues, service line and payer financing models, and provide direction and review of health system operating and capital budgets.

- Successfully partner with clinical leadership to help drive clinical transformation and clinical integration with a focus on shifting the organization from volume to value.
- Motivate and lead a high-performing leadership team built on mutual trust and respect. Demonstrate the value of a strong team-oriented environment.
- Collaborate seamlessly across the health system on engaging, retaining, and increasing the performance and productivity of physicians and clinical staff, and acts as a model for integration across the system.
- Maintain constructive relationships with labor unions, especially the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA), balancing firmness and respect.
- Maintain primary presence in Duluth and demonstrate visible leadership across the system – including travel to Fargo and critical access hospital communities.

## Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives have been identified as priorities for the first 18 to 24 months for the COO (not listed in order of priority):

- Establish personal and professional credibility, gain respect, and build trust with senior leadership, peers, and their teams. The executive will be recognized as a collaborative and visible member of the executive leadership team. The COO must be able to adapt to and champion the mission, values, and belief statements of Essentia Health. The COO will serve as a key member and extension of the Office of the CEO.
- Strengthen enterprise-wide operating discipline, improving consistency, rigor, and execution across Essentia Health's markets. The COO will reduce variation across markets ensuring accountability at the local, regional, and system levels.
- Advance Essentia Health's transition from volume to value building on existing momentum, improving cost per unit of service, elevating quality, and outcomes, and sustaining long-term financial performance.
- Lead the redesign of the care delivery and operating model translating value-based strategy into consistent day-to-day execution and guiding the organization through a complex, multi-year transformation.
- Support the use of enabling technologies (e.g., Epic optimization, ambient clinical transcription, and enhanced patient data analytics) to support redesigned care models and deliver more personalized, patient centered care with improved outcomes.
- Reinforce a culture of accountability and transparency, reinforcing expectations, and preserving a mission driven, highly communicative culture.
- Develop, coach, and retain the next generation of leaders by strengthening internal bench strength and ensuring a robust, ready pipeline of operational talent across the organization. The COO will also serve as a strong recruiter of high-caliber talent actively identifying and recruiting leaders who align with the mission and elevate performance.
- Deliver sustainable financial performance, supporting margin improvement, disciplined capital deployment, and balance sheet strength to fund strategic priorities.
- Manage operational complexity across a diverse enterprise, including tertiary, community, and rural facilities, ensuring performance excellence while tailoring approaches to local market needs.
- Establish a strong, visible presence across Essentia Health's service area. The COO must have system-wide engagement across the system with frequent interaction with market leaders, physicians, and staff.

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## Candidate Qualifications

### Education/Certification

- A graduate degree in business administration, health care administration, management, or related field is required.

### Knowledge, Work Experience and Leadership Attributes

- Ten or more years of progressive healthcare operations leadership experience in a complex health system environment. Five years of experience at the executive level within a complex hospital/health system. Multi-site experience is highly preferred.
- Demonstrated track record of achieving strong financial, operational, and quality performance in a large, complex health care organization. The COO will possess excellent financial and analytical skills and insightful business acumen.
- Credibility to forge strong partnerships with senior leaders across a matrixed health system. The executive must be comfortable working at all levels of a system, from visibility with front line staff to presenting to the Board of Directors.
- Experience working with Boards of Directors and a solid track record of developing and articulating a vision and operational strategy in coordination with the CEO.
- Strategic thinker with the ability to continuously study trends and forces driving change in the health care environment and synthesize large amounts of information determining what forces will drive organizational change in the future.
- Highly analytical and innovative problem solver possessing strong multi-tasking, organizational, and project planning skills, and demonstrating ability to meet aggressive deadlines.
- Track record of having made significant contributions to creating and shaping overall business strategy and executing it. Strong strategic-decision making capability with proven ability to understand and calculate the qualitative and quantitative inherent risks and implications of decisions on all constituents.
- Champions the principles of continuous improvement and best practice standards across the entire enterprise, with working knowledge and skill of Lean methods of management and contemporary knowledge of process improvement methodologies.
- Highly organized and disciplined with a strong work ethic and sense of urgency. Demonstrates self-initiative and self-confidence, with high emotional intelligence, and able to accept delegated responsibilities, and initiate change.
- Possesses exceptional communication and listening skills and a track record of establishing and maintaining an organizational climate the models inclusion, respect, openness, and clarity of purpose.
- Demonstrated strengths as an organizational leader, proven mentor and coach to senior leaders to implement the organizational strategy, and to inspire and maintain high performance.
- Successful track record of developing trust and rapport with physicians and other key clinical leaders, engaging them in future plans, and collaborating on clinical quality, service and program growth.
- A self-confident, proactive, decisive leader with the people skills to achieve maximum results in a complex environment. Skilled in influencing, problem solving, and negotiating with diverse groups of stakeholders.

- Demonstrated aptitude identifying high-risk situations and developing effective mitigation strategies.
- Calm under pressure. Maintains steadiness in conflict-heavy environments, including union negotiations and operational crises.

## The Community

### Duluth, MN

Situated at the westernmost point of the Great Lakes on the north shore of Lake Superior, Duluth, Minnesota is best known for its rocky shoreline and an outstanding view of the world's largest freshwater lake. Duluth is the largest metropolitan area on Lake Superior, with a municipal population of more than 87,000 and a metropolitan area population of more than 280,000.

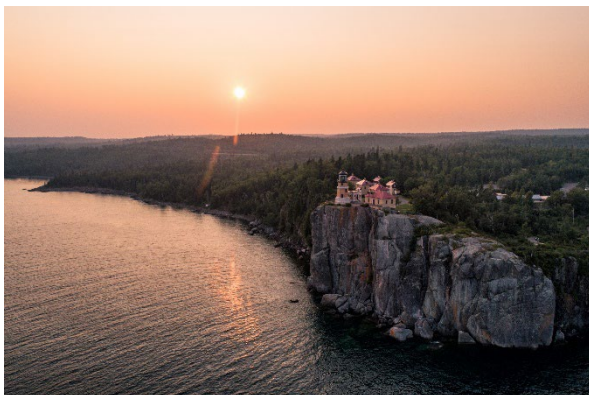
The fifth largest city in Minnesota, this city offers a variety of outdoor recreational activities including sailing, fishing, golfing, hiking, mountain biking and downhill and cross-country skiing. The city proper boasts over 11,000 acres of green space, numerous streams, golf courses, over cross-country ski trails. A low crime rate, high quality of life and natural beauty frequently earns Duluth high rankings in 'best places to live' surveys conducted by Outside magazine.



There is more than natural beauty in Duluth. The city is a major regional center for health care, higher education, retail and business services. It draws people from a vast geographic area encompassing northeastern Minnesota, northwestern Wisconsin and the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In addition to the University of Minnesota Duluth, the city is the corporate home for several other large employers, including Allstate, a multi-state power company and Maurice's, a national fashion retail chain. Higher education is a major force in the city. The College of St. Scholastica and Lake Superior College are located in Duluth. The University of Wisconsin-Superior, located just across the bay, is a major employer for many Duluth residents.

Duluth offers a wide variety of cultural activities as well. Each year the city's auditorium hosts a long list of popular entertainers. The Minnesota Ballet, Duluth Playhouse, and Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra provide exciting year-round schedules. Duluth's many historical attractions include Glensheen Mansion, a 39-room, neo-Jacobean style mansion built on the Lake Superior shore, the St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center, and the Marine Museum at Canal Park. The city and surrounding area boast a number of excellent restaurants and is developing a national reputation for its outstanding artisanal breweries.

While the economy is diverse, Duluth is best known for tourism. Duluth is a convenient base for trips to the scenic North Shore via Highway 61 and to fishing and wilderness destinations in Minnesota's far north, including the Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Tourists also may drive on the North Shore Scenic Drive to Gooseberry Falls State Park, Baptism Falls (Minnesota's largest waterfall), the vertical cliff of



Palisade Head, Isle Royale National Park (reached via ferry), Grand Portage National Monument in Grand Portage, and High Falls of the Pigeon River (on the Canadian border). Thunder Bay, Ontario, can be reached by following the highway into Canada along Lake Superior. Minnesota's only national park, Voyageurs National Park, is located southeast of International Falls.

For additional information regarding the Duluth area, please visit the following websites:

[www.duluthmn.gov](http://www.duluthmn.gov)

[www.visitduluth.com](http://www.visitduluth.com)

## Procedure for Candidacy

Please direct all applications, nominations and inquiries to Jim King, Keshia Harris, and Molly Solomon, preferably via email to [msolomon@wittkiewfer.com](mailto:msolomon@wittkiewfer.com).

	Title	Phone
<b>Jim King</b>	Senior Partner	(952) 270-3845
<b>Keshia Harris</b>	Principal	(678) 302-1555
<b>Molly Solomon</b>	Senior Associate	(949) 797-3510

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*The base salary range for this position is \$800,000-\$1,100,000 commensurate with the selected candidate's qualifications, education, and experience. In addition, this executive will be eligible for an annual incentive bonus, retirement, and additional benefits.*

The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. This material has been copied, compiled, or quoted in part from Essentia Health documents and personal interviews and is believed to be reliable. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and factual situations govern.

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