

December 4, 2019

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**BY EMAIL TRANSMISSION**

The Honorable Lisa Piercey, MD, MBA, FAAP  
Commissioner  
Tennessee Department of Health  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Request for Physician Waiver (Cardiologist)

Dear Commissioner Piercey,

Ballad Health ("Ballad") has identified an immediate need for a cardiovascular disease provider at Holston Valley Medical Center ("HVMC") in Kingsport, Tennessee and is requesting a waiver under Section 5.05(e) of the Terms of Certification. The Wellmont Cardiology Services ("WCS") clinics in the Kingsport region have experienced a net loss of three (3) FTE non-invasive cardiologists in the last five (5) years, resulting in a backlog of up to 1,500 patients due for follow-up appointments and up to four (4) weeks' lead time for new patient appointments.

To address staffing challenges, WCS has been redeploying physician and advanced practitioner resources among various locations (including reassigning hospital resources to clinics), increasing clinic utilization for APP clinics, and developing more efficient scheduling of diagnostic interpretation duties. Although these changes have resulted in a ten percent (10%) increase in clinic volumes from fiscal year 2018 to fiscal year 2019, the demand for services remains higher than clinic capacities.

Ballad would like to credential Dr. Michael Ponder at HVMC to help alleviate the backlog of patients. Dr. Ponder currently practices with Ballad's Mountain State Medical Group and is privileged at Norton Community Hospital in Norton, Virginia and Indian Path Community Hospital ("IPCH") in Kingsport, Tennessee. Currently, Dr. Ponder is underutilized at IPCH due to a low volume of cardiac inpatients at the facility and the fact that he does not have access to a catheterization laboratory. Dr. Ponder has capacity for additional hospital responsibilities and believes his patients would benefit from the full cardiac services offered at HVMC.

Therefore, effective February 1, 2020, Dr. Ponder would like to transition his practice to WCS and obtain staff privileges at HVMC. Dr. Ponder's transition to WCS will improve patient access to care at WCS's Kingsport clinic. In addition to inpatient services, Dr. Ponder's assistance with

cardiac diagnostic test interpretation at HVMC will free up other WCS cardiologists for more capacity to address their clinic backlogs at the Kingsport office.

Although the most recent Provider Needs Assessment for HVMC identified a surplus of 0.5 FTE cardiovascular disease providers in 2018, such assessment was performed prior to the departure of a 1.0 FTE cardiologist in 2019. The Provider Needs Assessment still predicts a deficit of 3.0-3.3 FTE cardiologists for HVMC by 2021.

Due to these factors, Ballard is respectfully requesting a waiver under Section 5.05(e) of the Terms of Certification that would allow Dr. Ponder to obtain privileges at HVMC.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. Please let us know if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,



Alan Levine

cc: Herbert H. Slatery III  
Tennessee Attorney General

Janet M. Kleinfelter  
Deputy Attorney General

Jeff Ockerman, Director, Division of Health Planning  
Tennessee Department of Health

Larry Fitzgerald  
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M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA, Commissioner  
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