FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Mary Barker (831) 622-2757
Communication and Marketing: (831) 625-4505

September 5, 2018

Montage Health names medical director for innovative new child/adolescent behavioral health program Ohana

Monterey, Calif. — When Roberta “Bertie” Bialek Elliott donated $105.8 million to Montage Health in January 2018 — the largest gift ever in Monterey County — she designated those funds for the creation of an innovative approach to child and adolescent behavioral health —Ohana. That vision is now one step closer to reality with the hiring of Susan Swick, MD, MPH, a clinical psychiatrist from the East Coast after a national search for an innovator in pediatric/adolescent behavioral health.

“We are excited to welcome Susan to Montage Health,” said Dr. Steven Packer, Montage President/CEO. “She has the passion and the enthusiasm to turn Bertie’s vision into reality. She was working on a similar project — at a smaller scale — in the Boston area and we are pleased she will bring her experience to our project.”

Swick, who completed her training at Columbia University and Harvard Medical School, will join Montage in October and will oversee everything from the construction of a bricks-and-mortar Ohana House to early intervention, comprehensive support for young people and their families, and partnerships with an extensive collection of community organizations.

“I’m so excited and really honored. When I was interviewing I thought ‘This job is for me,’ ” said Swick, a child and adolescent psychiatrist who currently works as the chief of the division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Newton-Wellesley Hospital in Newton, Massachusetts. “I’m a true believer in providing evidence-based, family centered care, coupled with education and prevention efforts. I’m also a big believer that it can enhance the health and well-being of the whole community.

“The hope is that (at Ohana) we can create a system where people know where to go. A gift like this enables us to create treatment for the whole range of mental health issues. It’s treatment and it’s a community resource.”
The need is clear, in the state and in Monterey County.

- 1 in 13 California children suffer from a mental illness that limits participation in daily activities, according to the California Health Care Foundation
- A survey in 2014-2017 by the California Department of Education found that nearly 1 in 3 Monterey high school students suffered depression-related feelings.
- California has fewer than 1,050 child psychiatrists to serve more than 9 million children and teens.
- 44 of California’s 58 counties — including Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz — have no child/adolescent psychiatric beds, according to the California Hospital Association

In Monterey County, when crisis strikes for a young person and their family, children and adolescents may spend several days in an emergency room, waiting for a bed to be located in a county 2 or more hours and more than 100 miles away. Often, they return to the emergency department, where the cycle begins again.

In collaboration with a growing team of child and adolescent mental health professionals at Montage, Swick plans to change that. She will rely on her experience at Newton-Wellesley Hospital, where she presently oversees two main areas — the clinical outpatient program and the psychiatric consult service. The program is general child and adolescent psychiatry, focusing on general mental health disorders including anxiety, depression, ADHD, suicide prevention, mood disorders, and other general psychiatry treatment programs.

“Psychiatric illnesses in children and adolescents are common — 20% of the people have them,” Swick said. “It’s twice as common as asthma. It’s always treatable, sometimes curable, and sometimes preventable. But only 20% of children with a psychiatric illness are seen by a mental health professional.

“Reducing that stigma is about education. These are common problems. They’re treatable. Think about how 50 years ago, nobody said the ‘C’ word when whispering about cancer. People were so terrified of cancer. Now it’s not like that. We should make psychiatric symptoms talk-about-able. And we need to improve access to high-quality, family centered healthcare.”

Over the course of the next 5 years for Ohana, there will be the extensive development of programs throughout the community that involve the entire family, schools, pediatricians, community and government organizations, and others. There will also be the construction of Ohana House, the hub for all things Ohana. Ohana House will be a warm and welcoming place, with inpatient care in a peaceful, healing environment, as well as a broad range of outpatient programs, services, and partnerships.

“We don’t have a precedent (anywhere nationwide) for how to do this well,” Swick said. “My expectation is that it will be an iterative process. It’s an exquisite opportunity. And I was very impressed with the way the leaders at the hospital and in the community talked about Ohana. The spirit around the project is wonderful.”
Ohana House will be built on property owned by Montage Health at Ryan Ranch in Monterey and tentatively will include:

- 18-24 inpatient beds, with separate areas for boys and girls
- Indoor and outdoor recreational and quiet spaces
- An outpatient treatment wing
- Rooms for one-on-one and family counseling
- Work and office space for community activities
- Educational space for training and workshops

For more information, go to www.montagehealth.org/ohana

###

**About Montage Health**
Montage Health is the local, nonprofit parent company of a family of organizations dedicated to improving lives by delivering exceptional care and inspiring the pursuit of optimal health. Through its subsidiaries and its partnerships with doctors and other clinicians, healthcare and community organizations, and, most importantly community members, Montage Health is dedicated to care that is coordinated across all care settings to meet each person’s goals and needs. Montage Health companies include Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Montage Medical Group, Montage Health Foundation, Montage Wellness Center, Aspire Health Plan, and Community Health Innovations.