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Health department has new administrator

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BRADENTON — The Manatee County Health Department has a new administrator.

County commissioners Tuesday approved the state's recommendation to appoint Dr. Jennifer Bencie Fairburn as the new administrator of the county health department.

"I think the community's going to love her," said Dr. Aaron Sudbury, president of the Manatee County Medical Society, who served on the selection panel that interviewed Fairburn.

Fairburn was one of four finalists for the position to replace Dr. Gladys Branic, who retired as director of the local health department in June.

"She stood out above everybody else with the breadth of her ability and past experience," Sudbury said.

Fred Loveland, director of the Manatee County Community Services Department, also served on the selection panel and agreed it was Fairburn's experience that made his choice easy.

"With her background as administrator of other county health departments," Loveland said, "she had a known quality."

Fairburn, who was raised in Michigan, has worked in Florida since at least 1996 when she served as executive director of the Orange County Healthy Start Coalition.

Her work experience includes several positions with local health departments, including assistant director in Orange County, acting administrator in Miami-Dade County and administrator in Seminole County.

The 1988 graduate of the Universidad Autonoma medical school, in Guadalajara, Mexico, has taught at the Florida State University College of Medicine, where she also served as the hospital liaison to the Florida Department of Health Division of Emergency Medical Operations.

Fairburn's most recent position was with the Florida Department of Health, where she was the director of the Division of Emergency Medical Operations.

She also has a master's of science in administration degree in health services from Central Michigan University.

Because Fairburn is not licensed to practice medicine in Florida, according to state statute she cannot hold the title of director of a county health department.

The doctor, who is fluent in Spanish, said lightheartedly when she was introduced to the commission Tuesday that when she was in medical school she wanted to be a surgeon, but because she is left-handed she had trouble with the scissors.

"So I felt public health would be better," Fairburn said.

Fairburn, who has family living in the area, is expected to start within three weeks, Loveland said.

The press office of the state health department would not permit Fairburn to be interviewed Tuesday.

Carl Mario Nudi, reporter, can be reached at 745-7027.

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