

By Housley Carr

Big-Budget Hospital Projects Move Ahead

Uncertainty over Affordable Care Act not slowing pace



BRAND NEW Shriners Hospitals/St. Louis is building a new 90,000 sq ft replacement hospital.

Despite financial stress and concerns some have raised about the effects of the Affordable Care Act—better known as Obamacare—a considerable number of big-budget health-care projects are under construction or on the drawing board in the U.S.

Major drivers behind all the new hospitals, expansions and major renovations include an increased focus on outpatient care, strong customer preference for single inpatient rooms, and the need to upgrade technology and allow for easy upgrades in the future.

Much of the work involves brand-new, from-the-ground-up facilities.

Shriners' Hospitals/St. Louis, for example, is starting work on a 90,000-sq-ft in-city replacement hospital that will provide only 12 inpatient beds but much more space for outpatients and research. "We're doing so much more outpatient

surgery and care now," says hospital spokeswoman Tammy Robbins. She says the old hospital, opened in 1963 in the St. Louis suburbs, "was built to house patients for months at a time" as they recuperated from orthopedic surgery.

"Also, the hospital is aging" and needs a lot of technological upgrades that would have been difficult or impossible in the old building, Robbins says. It will cost \$37 million to build the new hospital and another \$13 million to outfit it, she says, adding that the building will be completed in late 2014 and opened in early 2015.

One of the largest health-care projects in the U.S. is in Fargo, N.D., where Sanford Health is building a \$494-million, 11-story regional hospital with one million sq ft of space. When it opens in phases in late 2016 and early 2017, the new Sanford Medical Center will provide 384 inpatient beds, 28 operating rooms,

and 51 emergency-room bays, says Sanford spokeswoman Emily Bormann.

The last of the roughly 1,300 steel foundation pilings for the X-shaped hospital tower recently were driven, and work on the building's superstructure will begin by mid-2014. Sanford expects the overall project to require some 1.4 million man-hours to complete.

Growth in Connecticut

A project of similar magnitude is well under way in the Connecticut suburbs of New York City. Stamford Hospital is building a \$450-million, 11-story medical center. According to hospital spokeswoman Melissa Loparco, the new facility will provide, among other elements, more space for emergency-room operations, single rooms with bathrooms for all inpatients, more and larger surgical suites, and an expanded intensive-care department.

Stamford Hospital at first considered a multi-phase, gradual expansion and renovation of the existing medical center, an effort that would have taken as long as 15 years to complete.

In contrast, the new 641,000-sq-ft hospital, including a central utility plant, is scheduled to finish by spring 2016.

"Our goal is to transition the hospital from its current traditional and institutional feel to a more calming, open and welcoming environment," says Stanley Hunter, director of the hospital's master-plan project. "This will include the use of natural light and efficient building design to more closely integrate our facilities with nature, along with incorporating more effective noise control and way-finding." The new design, he says, "will promote human interaction and provide ample space for meeting and reflection consistent with the Planetree philosophy of care," a 35-year-old approach that focuses on patient needs.

The need for comprehensive physical and technological improvements is leading several other hospitals to plan entirely new facilities. Consider Marquette, on Michigan's upper peninsula, and Corning, in upstate New York.

Marquette General Hospital and Duke LifePoint Healthcare, which acquired the hospital last fall, are planning a new 265-bed hospital to replace Marquette's existing regional medical center. They also are planning a 168,000-sq-ft physician office building next door.

"Many, many details need to be worked out," says Marquette General Hospital CEO Gary Muller of the \$290-million plan. The hospital and Duke LifePoint Healthcare first weighed the possibility of expanding and renovating the existing facility before determining that a new hospital made more sense, he notes.

Marquette modernization

It is expected to take about three years to plan, design and construct the new facilities. Muller says starting from scratch will enable the hospital to design "a modern medical office building, cancer center, inpatient and outpatient surgical centers,

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multiple tertiary care centers and provide an all-private inpatient room model."

He says Marquette General Hospital currently includes "a cluster of structures ranging in age from nearly 100 years old to 10 years old" and that the new buildings will enable the hospital "to embrace the medical advances and many ongoing changes in medical-care delivery."

Similar thinking is behind the \$146-million Guthrie Corning Hospital, now more than half-built just outside Corning, N.Y. The 232,000-sq-ft facility, which will replace an aging hospital in town, will provide 65 private rooms and—

as at all virtually all other medical-related projects—much more space for outpatient surgery and care.

Guthrie Corning Hospital, scheduled to open in July 2014, also will offer a larger cancer center as well as a helipad to facilitate faster transfers of trauma patients.

Another example from the long list of brand-new hospitals now being built comes from Fort Collins, Colo. There, Banner Health recently started construction of a new two-story, 145,000-sq-ft hospital with a 24-bed inpatient unit, labor and delivery rooms, medical imaging, women's services, surgical services and lab services. The campus also will include an outpatient clinic and medical office building.

"We have planned this hospital with a 40-year time line, but we expect to be here much longer than that," says Rick Sutton, Banner Health CEO for the northern Colorado area. ■