

Providence adding surgery center

Tanasbourne - Health systems are trying to make more services accessible in less expensive sites than hospitals

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HILLSBORO -- Providence Health & Services is building a \$30 million surgery center in the Tanasbourne area of Washington County, as medical providers move to make health services more accessible -- at less expensive sites than hospitals.

The new facility, an addition to the Providence Tanasbourne Health Center campus, will house services including day surgery for orthopedics, gynecology and some general surgery. It's designed to serve the county's growing population by meeting high demand for such outpatient procedures, and is expected to open early in 2009.

"Oregon is a big state, and there's a lot of people that have to drive quite a ways to receive care," said Nancy Franssen, president of the industry group Oregon Ambulatory Surgery Associates.

Ambulatory, or outpatient, surgery centers "can actually be part of the answer."

Although Providence already offers some services in Tanasbourne, for surgeries Washington County residents must go to the Providence St. Vincent Medical Center at Cedar Mill. Tuality Healthcare, based in Hillsboro, also has built outpatient facilities in Washington County in recent years.

Outpatient care helps hospitals boost their bottom line by primarily serving patients with insurance; hospitals take losses serving uninsured patients. And although building facilities isn't cheap, it's less expensive on sites other than hospital campuses, said Terry Smith, Providence health system's chief operating officer. The \$30 million estimate for the new building includes equipment costs.

The outpatient environment makes a difference, too, Franssen said.

"The environment isn't as stressful as going into a hospital," she said. "It makes it easier, I feel, for most patients, because it doesn't seem as serious."

The Tanasbourne campus, at Northwest 185th Avenue and Cornell Road, already includes primary care offices, an immediate care clinic and laboratory, rehabilitation and imaging services.

In addition to the outpatient centers run by hospitals, there are 25 ambulatory surgery centers across the metro area, according to the Oregon Health Care Licensure and Certification program.

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Much of the hospital-related growth is happening on the west side of the region, as several hospital systems seek to match Washington County's growth.

About 511,000 people live in the county, second in Oregon only to Multnomah County with 710,000 residents, according to Portland State University estimates. State economists estimate Washington County's population will grow by 55,000 in the next 12 years.

Providence also is building an outpatient health center in Tualatin and recently added 72 beds at St. Vincent Medical Center.

Kaiser Permanente has considered building a hospital in Hillsboro, which would be its second in the Portland area. But it is re-evaluating plans after recent turnover in top executive positions. Its permits for the hospital expire this fall, and the organization plans to make a decision before then, said Mary Sawyers, a spokeswoman.

The greatest demand is in outpatient care, said Brian Costa, a spokesman for Tuality Healthcare. Of the 187,000 patient visits or procedures in the Tuality system during the 2007 fiscal year, 6,600 were inpatient, he said. The rest were composed of outpatient care, lab work and emergency room care, he said.

Although the growth in health services generally is good, there's always the possibility of building more than is needed, potentially pushing up health care costs, said Neal Wallace, a Portland State University associate professor of health economics.

Once you build it, "it doesn't go away," he said.

But the hope is that increasing convenience and competition through outpatient centers will reduce costs, supporters say.

Dennis Child, 39, of Hillsboro looks forward to having more services close to home. Child has been getting rehabilitation for a broken wrist at the Tanasbourne Health Center.

As a motocross enthusiast, Child said he's prone to injury.

"I end up hurting myself, and having expanded doctors' offices and rehab is a good thing," he said.

"Bringing that closer now gives some more options."

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