

## **Building surge results in smarter hospitals**

VINELAND, NJ (AP). Greeters direct new arrivals at the elevators. Wireless telephone systems and Internet access are available. And every guest room is private, cheerful and with a foldout chairbed.

Hospital or hotel?

It's a hospital, and the patient-comfort and high-tech features at the just-opened South Jersey Regional Medical Center in Vineland defines the dramatically different design of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century hospitals.

"We've used light, space (and) single rooms to really create a conducive environment to treating patients," said Chet Kaletkowski, chief executive officer of South Jersey Healthcare.

The system consolidated three older hospitals into a new one, about 30 miles southeast of Philadelphia, with specialized care areas such as surgery, cancer and heart treatment.

Many of the other hospitals opening around the country are also designed to promote faster healing, prevent medical errors, increase efficiency and meet the rising demand and expectations of aging baby boomers.

Rick Wade, as senior vice president at the American Hospital Association, said that during the prosperous mid-1990s, when financing was readily available, hospitals started planning the current projects.

Besides replacing outdated buildings that can't be wired for new technology, he said, hospitals also are trying to comply with stricter federal privacy laws, creating private rooms and placing emergency room beds between walls instead of curtains.

Thanks to suggestions from staff and others, standardized layouts and equipment in each room at South Jersey Regional Medical Center mean patients rarely will be moved as they heal or get sicker. Wireless phones for staff have eliminated overhead paging systems.

Laptop computers stationed just outside each patient room save nurses and doctors time as they check on lab tests or entering vital signs after examining patients. Pneumatic tubes zip blood and urine samples to labs for testing.

Patient registration is done by phone in advance or for urgent patients, at the bedside after they are admitted. Labor and delivery suites have whirlpool bathtubs for patients and, for family members, leather sofas and armoires holding big televisions.

“We didn’t want to come into a new hospital and do things the way we did before,” Katekowsky said.

The Vineland hospital was the second brand-new one to open in New Jersey since May, when the Jersey City Medical Center replaced “an FDR-era building that was antiquated,” said New Jersey Hospital Association spokeswoman Kerry McKean Kelly.

Nationwide, **experts predict \$12 billion to \$25 billion will be spent on hospital construction each year for the next decade, up from \$9.5 billion in 1999.**

Market forecaster Reed Construction Data-RSMeans says **more than 800 U.S. hospitals are planned in the next several years.**

And Robert Murray, chief economist at data company McGraw-Hill’s construction division, said the number of new hospital projects starting in 2004 was 265, up from 254 last year.

**Slightly more than half the new hospital construction involves completely new buildings, a big shift from the 1990s, when most spending was on additions or renovations.**

“We are essentially rebuilding the infrastructure of our health care system,” said Robert Levine, vice president of Turner Healthcare, a major builder of health facilities. **“It’s the strongest construction market that I’ve ever seen (in 40 years) in health care.”**

*Source: Above article appeared in the Public Opinion newspaper, dated August 18, 2004.*