

Expanding the Emergency Department Top Priority at Rome Memorial Hospital

(Feb. 2004) -Expansion plans are beginning to take shape at Rome Memorial Hospital as it takes steps to better serve the community's growing emergency care needs, according to President/Chief Executive Officer Darlene Burns.

Based upon the findings of a recent master facility plan, Rome Memorial Hospital expects to file a certificate of need with the state Department of Health in the first quarter to double the size of its emergency department from 3,500 square feet to 7,000 square feet.

"The Emergency Department is the heart of our organization," Mrs. Burns said. "Yet, I know that we struggle with long wait times because of the sheer number of people that turn to us for help."

"Expanding the emergency department will help us to maximize our efficiency and convenience for our patients," Mrs. Burns said.

The current Emergency Department was built in 1976, when the number of patient visits numbered less than 10,000 per year. In 2003, the Emergency Department staff treated 19,165 patients, a 3.4% increase over 2002.

"We have been seeing an ongoing increase in the number of patients over the last several years," Mrs. Burns said. "And not only are we treating more people, but the patients that come to us for help tend to have more complex medical problems because of the aging of the population."

The number of seniors treated in the Emergency Department has climbed more than 20% in the last five years.

Planning for the Emergency Department expansion project is in its early stages. "Now that we have the master facility plan completed, we have some decisions to make about our possible expansion options," Mrs. Burns said.

Preliminary plans call for extending the Emergency Department out towards Black River Boulevard and increasing the number of treatment rooms by 75% from eight to 14. The rooms would be configured around a centralized nursing station to enhance workflow and patient privacy. The new Emergency Department will also feature a designated "Fast Track" area to expedite patients whose needs are not as emergent as those with life-threatening injuries or illnesses. Other highlights include a larger patient waiting area, a separate entrance for ambulances and dedicated space for ambulance and security personnel. A start date for the construction will be set once the certificate of need application is filed and approved. Cost figures are not yet available.

Expanding Cancer Care

Rome Memorial Hospital is also adding new technology to help patients fighting cancer.

The New York State Health Department approved the hospital's certificate of need application to provide intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) for cancer patients at Mohawk Valley Radiation Medicine, 107 E. Chestnut St.

"IMRT is one of the most technologically advanced treatment methods available in external beam radiation therapy," Mrs. Burns said. "IMRT allows very precise external beam radiotherapy treatments, which means that we will be able to deliver a higher dosage to the tumor, while minimizing exposure to surrounding healthy tissues."

"Once again we're making advanced treatments available within our community for the convenience of those who need them," Mrs. Burns said. A launch date for the new cancer treatment is tentatively set for the fourth quarter of 2004.

More Beds for Senior Behavioral Health

Another area that the hospital will be evaluating for possible expansion is its 11-bed Senior Behavioral Health Unit. "We have been at 100% occupancy with a waiting list," Mrs. Burns said. "We are the only facility in the region that specializes in geriatric psychiatry and there's a definite unmet need in the community."

Located on the hospital's second floor, the 11-bed Senior Behavioral Health Unit is a secure therapeutic environment that provides health care for seniors who have depression, anxiety, dementia, and other problems.

Recruiting Physician Specialists

Many new physicians joined Rome Memorial Hospital's medical staff in 2003 as part of an aggressive recruiting campaign to improve local access to physician specialists.

"We've been making good progress bringing new physicians to the Rome area," Mrs. Burns said. For example, a new surgeon, three new pediatricians, an otolaryngologist, a psychiatrist and two oncologists came to Rome in 2003.

"We hope that 2004 will bring us two neurologists, two orthopedists and a new gastroenterologist," Mrs. Burns said. "It's the quality of life that the community offers and the hospital's quality of care that appeals to the new physicians. Rome provides them with a tremendous opportunity to establish a new practice and raise a family."

Rome Memorial Hospital posts another positive year

Finishing 2003 with a positive operating margin to reinvest back into new services, advanced technology and a well-trained work force, Rome Memorial Hospital continues to outperform most hospitals in the state.

Nearly two-thirds of New York hospitals were expected to lose money in 2003, continuing last year's trend. Rome Memorial Hospital's surplus from operations was \$863,234 in 2003, according to Basil J. Ariglio, senior vice president/chief financial officer.

“Our directors and managers are very proficient in matching essential resources to our patient volume, which helps us to manage our expenses,” Ariglio said. “We know that as a healthcare organization, we have to be responsive to changes in the industry in order to protect the financial stability of the hospital.”

“It’s not easy,” Ariglio admits. “Like other hospitals, we face the same challenges of higher labor and supply costs. We will likely be facing another round of Medicaid cuts that could erase our margin given the challenges of our state budget.”

“Our model of success continues to be based upon diversifying services, maintaining high levels of patient satisfaction, and controlling non-salary expenses without sacrificing patient care,” Ariglio said.