

# MTMC emergency visits seeing spike



JOHN A. GILLIS/DNJ

A sign points the way to the emergency department at the new Middle Tennessee Medical Center near Interstate 24 in Murfreesboro. In the first month since opening Oct. 2, emergency department visits were up by about 450 over the monthly visits seen when the hospital was located near downtown on Highland Avenue.

## CEO credits accessibility, better-equipped facility

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More people are visiting the Middle Tennessee Medical Center's emergency department since the move to its new location at Medical Center Parkway, hospital statistics show.

The average daily number of inpa-

tients is up from approximately 170 observation patients per day at the hospital's old emergency department to 181 per day since the hospital opened in its new location closer to the interstate, MTMC Vice President of Finance Martha Tolbert said.

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That represents an increase of about 331 patients in one month's time.

The hospital was seeing around 20 observation patients per day at the old hospital on Highland Avenue prior to its move on Oct. 2. Since then, the hospital is seeing an average of 24 patients per day at the new hospital in October, for an increase of roughly 124 people.

Tolbert explained that the increase is likely due to the location of the new hospital, which has increased the accessibility of the hospital's services to those in outlying

areas, along with the increase in Rutherford County's population and the fact that MTMC is better equipped than ever to handle heart and stroke patients.

"It's a combination of these factors, we believe, that has resulted in the phenomenal growth that we've seen at this new facility and over the past few years," Tolbert said. "We also have more beds (approximately 270 staffed beds compared to about 180 at the old hospital)."

Observation patients are defined as patients who are expected to be kept in the hospital for more than six hours but whose stabilization and discharge are expected within 24 hours. Those

	FY 2009	Avg/Day	FY 2010	Avg/Day	Increase FY '09-'10	Oct. '10	Avg/Day	Increase Present
Patient Days - inpatients	56,545	155	62,111	170	9.8%	5,510	181	6.3%
Observation patients	5,395	15	7,161	20	34.2%	746	24	22.7%
Total	61,940	170	69,272	190	11.9%	6,256	205	6.0%
ED visits	63,127	173	67,365	185	6.7%	6,109	197	6.7%

SOURCE: MIDDLE TENNESSEE MEDICAL CENTER

patients have usually had symptoms that have been unresponsive to at least four hours of ED treatment.

Inpatients are those patients whose conditions are severe enough to warrant at least an overnight stay.

The hospital was already seeing growth at its old facility, as well. Hospital statistics show the overall number of MTMC ED visitors had increased by about 5,000 total between 2009 and 2010.

The MTMC ED saw approximately 67,400 visitors in the ED in 2010 compared to the 63,100 in 2009, according to the hospital's statistics. The number of inpatients increased from about 56,550 in 2009 to 62,100 in 2010.

"I think what we are seeing is partly to be expected when you open up a brand new, state-of-the-art medical center," said MTMC CEO Gordon Ferguson. "What I think has caught us by surprise, though, is just

the sheer number and acuity of patients we see."

Ferguson said the hospital's success in offering

24-hour interventional cardiology services and orthopedics programs are

also part of the reason the hospital has seen increased numbers.

"In the past, there was a time when we didn't even offer that service. Then, for a time, we didn't offer it around the clock like we do now."

### New challenges

With the growth at the hospital come more challenges, Ferguson explained.

The hospital has an even greater responsibility to ensure patients are able to get in quickly, be treated efficiently and then dismissed when the time is right.

The new layout of the emergency department is one of several ways the hospital has tried to address the efficiency of patient care.

"The actual layout and design features of this new hospital have allowed better flow of patients through the facility," Ferguson said. "The constructors of this hospital were very cognizant of their design of the emergency department and what it was going to be used for while it was being constructed. The result is a streamlined emergency department where the best care can be provided."

Another important aspect, Ferguson said, is the continuation of the "fast track component" of the emergency department for less critical patients.

"Fast track is a portion of the emergency department that is dedicated to treating the bumps and the flu-like symptoms, and we try to keep those patients segregated from the more critically ill patients," Ferguson explained. "Our staffing patterns are a lit-



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tle different there and we try to get these patients treated and released as soon as we can."

By far the most important aspect of all, Ferguson said, is the training, technology and methods now being utilized and tested in the emergency department. Nurses are better trained and patients can be more closely monitored due to better technology.

There is no longer a centralized nursing station like there was in the old MTMC emergency department.

"We have completely moved away from a centralized nursing station to a decentralized one, primarily to reduce the amount of distance between our nurses and our patients," Ferguson explained. "In doing that, it changes the staff's work flow significantly and it is kind of like moving into a new house. It has taken some time to get them settled into their new environment, but the goal here has been better efficiency and that has worked to a great degree."

### Still growing

The hospital's growth isn't even close to over yet, either, Ferguson added. The hospital currently has 265 staffed beds, but the aim is to eventually increase that to 286 staffed beds.

"Basically we need to fill the positions that are needed to staff those beds," Ferguson said. "The beds are already physically there, but we have to find the staff to care for the additional patients when that time comes."

The construction of a second medical office building to house other specialties is also under way on MTMC's campus. The Seton Medical Office Building, named after Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first U.S.-born canonized saint in the Roman Catholic Church, is expected to be completed in late 2011.

"The ultimate goal is to make sure we have the capacity to take care of this growing population in both our primary and secondary areas," Ferguson said. "And to do it in such a way that we have very positive patient outcomes and patient experiences."