



EXCLUSIVE REPORTS

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Doctors upgrade to include 3 new ORs

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Business First

Driven by a 40 percent increase in inpatient surgery cases last year, Doctors Hospital is ready to add three operating rooms as part of a \$3.4 million overhaul at the West Broad Street hospital.

"We've got pent-up demand," said Marcy Conti, vice president of operations and chief nursing officer at the hospital. "We need additional operating rooms to meet the needs of our patients and surgeons."

Doctors is seeking bids from contractors and hopes to begin construction in June, she said. A completion deadline of March 2004 has been set.

Conti said Doctors and Grant Medical Center have registered substantial increases in inpatient surgery cases since their parent company, OhioHealth, converted Doctors Hospital North to an urgent-care center and outpatient surgery site in 2002.

Each of Doctors' six general operating rooms are handling about 1,350 cases a year, she said. The industry norm is about 1,000 cases a year.

The ORs are so busy, Conti said, that surgeries are being scheduled on weekday evenings, with three operating rooms in use until 11 p.m.

One small operating room will be eliminated during the renovation. That will leave Doctors with seven general surgery ORs, plus one dedicated to open-heart surgery that opened last year.

The three new operating rooms and support areas will take up about 3,000 square feet on the hospital's first floor, said Doug Scholl, project architect for Dublin-based Andrews Architects, which is handling the design work.

Another 7,000 square feet of OR and support space will be renovated, he said, as will 3,000 square feet for pre- and post-operative care.

Construction of the new ORs will require a gift shop, coffee bar and some administrative and staff offices to be moved within the hospital. A lobby renovation is also on tap.

Minimal disruption

The work will have to be done with minimal disruptions to hospital services, Scholl said. Much of the construction is expected to take place during the night.

"That's going to be a process that takes a lot of coordination and close work between the staff, contractors, architects and engineers," he said, noting one of Andrews' niches is renovations of hospital facilities.

More expansion projects may be headed Doctors' way, said Kreg Gruber, chief operating officer at the hospital. He said he will have specifics after a list of capital improvement projects for all OhioHealth facilities goes to the hospital system's board this month.

At the top of Doctors' list, Gruber said, is an expanded emergency room. Patient volumes there place it among the busiest ERs in Columbus, he said, and the current space will not be able to keep pace with expected growth in Doctors' service area.

That includes west Columbus along a fast-growing suburban loop from Hilliard south to Grove City.

"We're looking at patient needs and demographic growth through 2008," Gruber said. "We see the whole west side growing, so the fundamental question becomes where we need to grow to handle the (patient) volumes projected over those years."

He said Doctors is in a greatly improved financial position to pay for expansion projects, compared with where it was in recent years.

Doctors expects to post an operating surplus of 2 to 3 percent on revenue approaching \$200 million when its fiscal 2003 ends June 30, Gruber said. That operating gain would follow losses of \$16.1 million, \$18.6 million and \$15.6 million in fiscal 2000, 2001 and 2002 respectively.

"That's good for the hospital, patients and community," he said of the improved financials. "We can begin again to reinvest in our health-care services."

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