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CAPITAL HEALTH OPENS ITS DOORS



John Holliday of Hopewell, right, greets his 9-year-old son, Justin Holliday, as he walks out of his room in the pediatric emergency unit at Capital Health's new Hopewell campus. Justin, who was treated for a finger injury, was the first patient in the hospital's pediatric ER and was given a stuffed animal to take home. The \$530 million hospital was in its first day of operation yesterday.



A patient is wheeled down a hallway after entering the Capital Health Medical Center-Hopewell yesterday. The hospital began admitting patients at 6 a.m.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MANCUSO/THE TIMES

New chapter begins for center as it strives to become an alternative for big hospitals in Philadelphia and New York

By Erin Duffy
STAFF WRITER

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP — Capital Health yesterday opened its new suburban hospital, a shining structure of brick, glass and steel officials hope will convince patients to bypass big-name hospitals in New York and Philadelphia for medical care closer to home.

Capital Health Medical Center-Hopewell began admitting patients yesterday at 6 a.m., three years after work began on the 165-acre Scotch Road campus Capital Health brass started planning a decade ago.

"This is a new chapter for Capital Health because it's the most significant accomplishment here to date," said Al Maghazehe, Capital Health's president and CEO.

"When you look at the vision we have for Capital Health, this is a major part of the vision that needed to happen and needed to happen now," Maghazehe said. "We're closer to that vision, which is to make Capital Health a regional health-care destination."

The hospital opening coincides with the closing of Capital Health's Mercer campus. A fleet of 24 ambulances

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transported 67 Mercer hospital patients to Hopewell yesterday morning in a move doctors, nurses, administrators and paramedics spent weeks preparing and practicing.

At Hopewell, the \$530 million hospital and adjoining office building span nearly one million square feet and includes 223 beds, two emergency departments (one bigger than a football field), 10 operating rooms and all private patient rooms. Staff number 1,600, including nearly 800 doctors with ties to the medical center.

MANY AMENITIES

Designed by architect HKS Inc. — the firm behind the swank Atlantis resort in the Bahamas — the hospital is flush with amenities more reminiscent of a resort getaway than a hospital setting.

A tiered waterfall cascades in front of the main entrance, original art adorns the hallways and walls and fireplace lounges abound in the five-story structure, which also includes rooftop gardens, a spa and a cozy little bistro offering \$5 lattes.

Staff members said the buzz surrounding the opening was palpable yesterday as corridors and departments bustled with activity for the first time.

"It's really exciting, it's beautiful," Dr. Judith Williamson, the head of the hospital's telemetry floor, said of her new work environment. "I drove up here at 6 o'clock in the morning and it was dark, and the hospital was shining, and it was beautiful."

"It's overwhelming, the excitement for the services we're going to be able to provide to the patients in this community," said Cheryl Wiseman, the nursing manager for the

hospital's fourth floor surgical unit. "It's going to take us to a whole new level."

That excitement extended to patients, including 9-year-old Justin Holliday, the first patient at Hopewell's pediatric emergency room, and his father, John.

"We raced over here, hoping we'd be the first patient," John Holliday joked.

Justin, given a teddy bear and superhero stickers by hospital staff, fell and bruised his finger at a gymnastics party Saturday night. Holliday brought him in early yesterday morning, fearing a fracture.

"We live in Hopewell and as it was being built over the last year or so we knew we'd be here eventually," said Holliday, a father of three.

While there's no denying the hospital's aesthetic achievements, Maghazehe said the real draw is the medical programs the hospital is built around.

Looking to lure in patients not just from Mercer, but the surrounding Bucks County, Pa., and Burlington, Hunterdon and Somerset counties, the Hopewell hospital offers a regional cancer center, a center for digestive health, technology such as CyberKnife radiosurgery and da Vinci robotic surgery, and specialty practices in growing areas like reconstructive surgery and orthopedics.

NEW PROGRAMS

"A new building is great, but the most important thing is new programs, new programs that bring patients in, patients that would otherwise go to Philadelphia or New York," Maghazehe said.

"Now we're ready to build these very comprehensive regional programs that are really the guts of Capital Health."

It's a bold — and expensive — strategy.



Color-coded signs indicate the appropriate entrance to use on a road leading to the Capital Health Medical Center-Hopewell campus which opened yesterday.

Maghazehe told The New York Times that Capital Health had to invest in a new hospital or risk the closure of Mercer, where in-patient volume has been in decline for years.

The Hopewell hospital, with its \$756 million mortgage, is backed by the Federal Housing Administration. It replaces the Mercer campus in Trenton, which was 116 years old and badly in need of upgrades.

Administrative offices and a satellite emergency department will remain open at Mercer's Bellevue Avenue location for the next year, but Capital Health has shifted its priorities — and hundreds of millions of dollars in resources — to a \$100 million upgrade and expansion of Regional Medical Center in Trenton and the construction of the Hopewell campus.

At Hopewell, plans already exist for a future expansion that would increase capacity to 500 beds.

According to officials, Hopewell is expected to admit 15,000 to 17,000 patients in its first year and net Capital Health an extra \$130 million in revenue, profits the health-care system will need to pay for the services, technology

and construction it's pumped money into.

PRIVATELY INSURED

With its deluxe setting and community-oriented medical programs, Hopewell is also expected to draw more affluent, privately insured patients from the region, helping to offset the money Capital Health loses on Medicaid and charity care reimbursements.

More hospitals in New Jersey — those that aren't closing — are turning to upgrades and new infrastructure to help augment profit margins that remain low and unpredictable in light of the economic downturn, experts say. Look no further than University Medical Center at Princeton, which will open its own new, \$447 million dollar hospital in Plainsboro next year, or the new Virtua hospital in South Jersey.

"I think in many respects our state is playing catch-up," said Betsy Ryan, the president and CEO of the New Jersey Hospital Association. "It's important to reinvest in your physical plant or rebuild when possible to remain competitive. All over New Jersey we're dealing with educated health-care consumers

who are looking for up-to-date facilities, be they brand new or have new investments, new capabilities, new equipment.”

For Capital Health, which last year grossed \$500 million in revenue, the financial situation is not as dire as at some hospitals.

Beyond profit, Maghazehe and officials are interested in branding Capital Health, with its posh Hopewell hospital and the sophisticated neurosciences program at Regional Medical Center, as one of the top hospital systems around, even without a university affiliation.

Dr. Gary Smotrich, a Lawrence plastic surgeon who is also on the staff at Capital Health, said that certain procedures should remain in the realm of academic medical centers. In his field of plastic surgery, he mentioned face transplants and separating conjoined twins.

“Both procedures don’t

involve any fancy technology, simply very large teams of surgeons and other personnel backed up by significant clinical and basic science research,” and are best completed in an academic setting, he said.

But Maghazehe believes the system can compete with the health-care market in New York and Philadelphia and top-name hospitals such as Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals.

“I do believe there’s nothing we can’t do in New Jersey, there’s no reason for people to go to Philadelphia,” Maghazehe said.

“Philadelphia people are no different from a genetic point of view, their DNA is no better than our DNA. We just need to get our act together and do what we need to do and quite frankly, take risks.”

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