

Construction to begin on Bethesda West Hospital

By Erika Pesantes, Sun Sentinel

Palm Beach County's newest hospital, Bethesda West, breaks ground Tuesday west of Boynton Beach after six years mired in legal challenges and appeals from competing hospitals.

West Boynton residents who get sick may be able to heal close to home by early 2013, when construction of the \$130 million hospital is scheduled to be completed. By then, the 80-bed facility would have been more than a decade in the making. Bethesda Healthcare System, which runs Bethesda Memorial Hospital in Boynton Beach, first proposed the idea in 2002.

"The state agreed with us that there is a need for a hospital to serve the West Boynton community, and we are thrilled to finally be here and provide quality health services in a caring manner," hospital CEO Robert Hill said in a statement. "The decision means access to lifesaving emergency medical care and inpatient services for the growing communities of western Boynton Beach."

Bethesda West is being built on a 58-acre site at West Boynton Beach Boulevard and U.S. 441, with enough room for a 45,000-square-foot medical office building and a potential 400-bed expansion in the future, hospital spokeswoman Lisa Kronhaus said.

Bethesda first got state regulators' approval to build in 2003, but was delayed by appeals filed by Delray Medical Center, JFK Medical Center and Wellington Regional Medical Center.

Over six years, judges ruled the area did not need a medical center, but Bethesda submitted a second bid, won approval again but continued to be stymied by a series of appeals by competing hospitals.

Finally, on May, 14, 2009, the state issued Bethesda approval of its Certificate of Need filing that allowed it to seek building permits to start construction.

"Now, the real work can begin to bring vital hospital services to serve our western communities," Hill said.

The Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations, which represents 89 communities in the suburban area, has long supported the new hospital, with members even flying to Tallahassee for trials and depositions over the years.

"We knew this was going to be a long-term project; it's worth the effort," said COBWRA president Ken Lassiter. "I'm sure it will save some lives."

The new five-story hospital will boast new technologies, environmental-friendly efficiencies and hotel-style "room service" for patients.

"Patient rooms are private. That's also helping patients heal faster," Kronhaus said, "Private rooms are better from an infection-control standpoint."

There will be 70 private inpatient rooms and 10 critical- and intensive-care rooms, offering patients prescribed menus from which they can order when hungry since there are no set meal times. Doctors will use a "paper lite" electronic medical records system, giving them test results in real time via their smart phones or computers.

They will have voice-activated computer assistants, which will automatically log dictated physician's notes, Kronhaus said.

The hospital will offer general medical and surgical services, with an emphasis on geriatrics, to include radiography, ultrasound, mammography, cardiac stress testing, physical rehabilitation and respiratory therapy.

Bethesda's current medical staff of 550 physicians will be shared with Bethesda West, which will have an additional 300 full-time employees and volunteers. Hospital officials plan to transfer the 80 beds for Bethesda West from Bethesda Memorial Hospital, currently a 401-bed facility 10 miles away from the new hospital site.

And just about 3 miles away, is Bethesda Health City, which offers pediatrics, family physicians, ophthalmology, dentists, plastic surgeons and a women's center.

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