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Expansion, inpatient rooms give center 'hospital' label

Business Courier of Cincinnati - by [James Ritchie](#) Staff Reporter

Greater Cincinnati has a new hospital.

A \$9 million expansion has given the **Surgery Center of Evendale** 29 inpatient rooms. And accreditation as a hospital this summer means the physician-owned center can keep patients overnight, which it couldn't do as an ambulatory surgery center.

The result is that surgeons can now perform more complicated operations, such as knee and hip replacements, at the center on Glendale Milford Road. The facility has cared for 40 inpatients so far, some for as long as three days, and expects soon to be caring for 100 per month.

Ten to 15 percent of its case volume will probably consist of inpatients, said campus administrator Kelvin Hanger.

"The environment is still very non-institutional," he said. "You feel like you're at home. The accessibility is good, and it's smaller and less confusing than established hospitals."

Controversial trend

But the three-floor expansion, which increased the Evendale campus' space to 105,000 square feet, is part of a controversial trend. Though the industry accrediting agency the Joint Commission inspected the Evendale facility and now classifies it as a hospital, the center does not have the hallmarks of a full-service hospital: an emergency department and intensive-care beds.

Traditional community hospitals claim that without emergency rooms, such freestanding centers endanger patients and poach profitable cases. Emergency departments tend to lose money, and hospitals often offset the losses with profitable lines such as heart procedures and orthopedic surgery.

"The thought is that an ER is a very important part of the overall benefit a hospital provides to its community," said Tiffany Himmelreich, spokeswoman for the **Ohio Hospital Association**. "It's a bit of an unlevel playing field as far as the financial situation and the benefit to the community."

The OHA supports legislation to force all hospitals to have a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week emergency room. But a bill to that effect has been stalled in the state Senate for more than a year.

Still, Hanger said the Evendale center could consider adding an ER, ICU or urgent care in the future.

Surgery centers like Evendale, which has 46 physician-owners, market themselves as an economical alternative to hospitals, saving money for both insurers and patients. For certain procedures, they're paid by insurers a third or half what hospitals receive, according to officials with **Prexus Health**, which manages Evendale.

Evendale, which performs orthopedic, ophthalmologic, otolaryngological and other procedures, is the second ambulatory surgery center in the Tri-State to "convert" to a hospital. Prexus' **Butler County Medical Center**, with eight inpatient beds, became a Joint Commission-accredited, Medicare-certified hospital in 2004.

Prexus operates five Greater Cincinnati surgery centers as well as facilities in Springfield, Ohio, and New Albany, Ind.

Evendale has furnished 15 of its inpatient rooms and likely will have nearly all of them ready for patients by the end of the year, Hanger said.

The growth would give the surgery center more inpatient beds than some of the Tri-State's outlying general hospitals. **Margaret Mary Community Hospital** in Batesville and **Adams County Regional Medical Center**, for example, are Critical Access Hospitals and can have no more than 25 inpatient medical/surgical beds. The program, which provides cost-based Medicare reimbursement, is intended to maintain health care in rural areas.

More control of care

Otolaryngologist Dr. Mark Deutsch, a board member for the Evendale center, said he likes operating in the controlled environment of a freestanding surgery center. There are a limited number of physicians and medications in the building, and he believes it's easier to avoid medical errors and infections.

"The main driver (for starting the center) was our desire as physicians to actually influence the care of our patients from the moment they walk in the door," Deutsch said.



Mark Bowen | Courier
 Dr. Mark Deutsch, right, and Kelvin Hanger, campus administrator of the Surgery Center of Evendale, chat with patient Linda Grau of Mariemont.

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He still operates on patients with more complicated medical needs, including those with morbid obesity or a history of cardiac problems, at other hospitals.

"What determines my decision to take a patient here or to another hospital," Deutsch said, "is simply the opportunity for care."

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