Lafayette growing as Acadiana health care center

By Pamela O'Brien

Health Editor

A single word expresses one of the key trends among area major healthcare systems: outpatient.

In Lafayette, officials at any given hospital are well aware of the fact that they have been studying their related needs for some time now. The result is the Lafayette General Medical Center, which is set to open a large new building. The Burdine Health Ambulatory Care Center, soon to be open to the public.

And at other major hospitals, expansion of the outpatient area continues. The Acadiana Medical Center, The Medical Center of Southwest Louisiana, and Women's and Children's Hospital - ambulatory clinics and services are being relocated or revised.

The impact, according to a combination of those involved, is twofold. "It's a surgery and a desire on the part of both patients and insurance companies to reduce the cost of medical care whenever possible," said one participant.

In fact, the notion of simplification, streamlining, and the move to outpatients from inpatients is something that everyone agrees makes more and more attractive in any form of hospital care.

For instance, Women's and Children's has just finished interior renovations on its 24-bed labor-delivery-recovery unit, which includes a private room for each mother and baby. The unit will be open in the same room during the entire project, "We've had tremendous feedback from everyone," says Mary Beth McDonald, director of communications.

The hospital also expects this renovation to come in as a new model of new building of 5,000 square feet.

Plus, the hospital has expanded its pediatrics and fertility clinics to drawing in part-time specialists from New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Construction workers have been busy at Lafayette General, but the hospital's expansion has just begun. It has been a large and growing process.

At Southwest, an entire third floor wing is being converted to an outpatient center. Gerald Formel, chief executive officer, says the need stems largely from increased utilization of the facilities. "The problem is that the patient is not being treated in their own hospital, the patient center will include new outpatient surgery suites, a pain management area, orthopedics facilities, and an orthopedic theater.

Another big addition at Southwest was the recent start of a new cardiac catheterization lab. The hospital also is expanding its door-to-door service and ambulance service.

At Acadiana Ambulance & Air, James Page makes the statement in the October issue of The Journal of Emergency Medical Services (JEMS) Observing that Acadiana has grown in two decades to a company with 14,000 members, 150 employees, 10 ambulances, and a five-bed hospital in a service area encompassing 1,000 square miles, he says, "We've been growing organically and have introduced the medical transport life support and medical transportation to the patient, including some very rural areas where poor people live."

One of Acadiana's most recognized programs, "Senior Care" for the elderly, was co-authored by The Journal of Emergency Medical Services as a model for elderly care. In one of its unique sections of the program, wearing special eye glasses to better understand their needs.