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Southeast Valley hospitals expanding

Growth plans aim to fill bed shortage

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The Arizona Republic
Aug. 30, 2007 12:00 AM

Two hospitals are coming online in the second half of 2007 but the medically underserved southeast Valley will be gaining only 66 beds.

Banner Gateway Medical Center on the Gilbert-Mesa border will be adding 176 beds when it opens Sept. 18, joining IASIS Healthcare's Mountain Vista Medical Center, which delivered 178 beds to east Mesa in July.

But the southeast Valley will be losing 288 beds when Banner Mesa Medical Center closes the same day Banner Gateway opens.

Virtually every hospital organization in the southeast Valley has ambitious expansion plans, with more than 1,400 new beds planned for the region.

"I think we could all keep building," said David Wanger, chief executive officer of Gilbert Hospital, which opened in February 2006. "I believe we are so severely under-bedded and underserved in the southeast Valley that it wouldn't make a difference if a few more hospitals opened up."

Arizona lags behind in hospital beds per 1,000 population. The state has two beds per 1,000 people, while the national average is 2.8 beds per 1,000 people, said Bridget O'Gara, vice president of communications for the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association.

Valley-wide, the need for hospital beds is expected to grow by 290 a year, the study concluded.

"I think the 350 beds makes sense," said Laurie Eberst, chief executive officer of Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. "We knew those numbers before building Mercy Gilbert."

Here's a look at what's coming:

Gilbert Hospital

In December, the emergency-focused hospital at Ray and Power roads plans to open 16 inpatient beds. In early 2008, the hospital will open an intensive-care unit.

The hospital's expansion will continue. In January, construction is expected to start on a \$70 million patient tower that will at

completion provide the hospital up to 90 additional inpatient beds. An ambulatory surgery center will be attached to the hospital's addition, but the hospital will not own it. Surgeons will own 85 percent of the attached surgery center.

Catholic Healthcare West

The organization is expanding both its major hospitals in the southeast Valley: Mercy Gilbert and Chandler Regional Medical Center.

Mercy Gilbert plans to open 90 patient beds in a new wing in January. In fall 2008, the hospital is expected to open the remaining 28 medical/surgery beds in its expansion.

When it's finished, the hospital's new wing will have a pediatrics area, intensive-care beds and surgery beds. Eberst said she is hiring for the \$35 million project now.

The hospital will start with 150-200 new employees for the expansion, a figure that could reach 400. Some employees will transfer from Chandler Regional Medical Center because the pediatrics unit will close there when the expansion at Mercy Gilbert opens. Job fairs are also planned for Sept. 13 at Mercy Gilbert, and Oct. 16 and 18 at Chandler Regional.

Hospital staffing is a national problem, said John Rivers, president and chief executive officer of the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association. "It is especially bad here," he said. "It will be the major challenge facing anyone wanting to open up a new hospital."

Chandler Regional plans to add a five-story tower attached to the south side of the existing building. The expansion, scheduled for 2010, will add 100 patient beds, and expand the hospital's intensive care and cardiovascular services.

Banner Health

Banner's plans in the southeast Valley don't end with Banner Gateway and the closing of Banner Mesa Medical Center.

Banner Gateway Medical Center will open with 176 beds, but expansions are planned. Two more towers can be added to the campus, and at build-out, Banner Gateway will have more than 500 beds. Planning for the second of three towers should start in 2008, and within the next decade for the third tower.

A \$328 million expansion project is under way at Banner Desert Medical Center. The centerpiece of the expansion is a seven-story patient tower that will house Banner Children's Hospital.

When it opens in 2009, the children's hospital will grow from 137 pediatric hospital beds to 248. The new facility will include dedicated pediatric operating rooms, pre-op and recovery space, an expanded pediatric emergency department, a new pediatric outpatient treatment center and dedicated clinical ancillary and therapy services, such as medical imaging just for children.

In October, Banner Baywood Medical Center in Mesa opened a new wing with patient beds, and has been opening supporting services for it, such as operating rooms, dialysis, materials management and a cafeteria, this year.

A.T. Still University

A.T. Still University plans to bring a complex to Baseline and Recker roads in Mesa that will house the region's first osteopathic medical college and the state's first osteopathic dental college.

Arizona Health and Technology Park will combine a 507-bed osteopathic training hospital with an emergency room, five physician office buildings and a hotel.

A.T. Still is Arizona's first osteopathic school, where doctors are trained to treat the causes of symptoms as well as the symptoms

themselves.

Phoenix Children's Hospital

This fall, Phoenix Children's expects to open a 30,000-square-foot specialty and urgent-care facility at the southwestern corner of Higley Road and Southern Avenue in Mesa. The hospital plans to open similar facilities around the Valley.

When the Mesa clinic opens, it should accommodate 35,000 to 40,000 visits per year.

The Phoenix Children's Mesa clinic will have 21 exam rooms and offer specialties ranging from endocrinology to psychology.