

Scotland Memorial Hospital Emergency Center Improvements

In 2004 when Scotland Health Care System approved a project that would renovate and expand the Emergency Center at Scotland Memorial Hospital, it was decided the hospital would not borrow money for the project, but that funding would come from hospital reserves and fundraising—including grants. The health system approached The Duke Endowment with their plans and were awarded two grants of \$200 000 each to support the development of Scotland Memorial Hospital's vision for its emergency facility and the services it provides.

Scotland Memorial Hospital is a 104 acute care bed, not-for-profit, community-owned hospital in Laurinburg, North Carolina. Located in the Sandhills region of the state, the hospital serves the health care needs of citizens of Scotland, Robeson, Hoke and Richmond counties in North Carolina and Marlboro County, South Carolina. Built in 1983, Scotland Memorial Hospital's Emergency Center (EC) was a state-of-the-art facility at the time of the hospital's construction. With 6400 square feet, the EC was designed to accommodate 10 000 patients annually. With the exception of a small addition in 1986, the EC underwent no major changes or expansions in the next two decades, while the annual number of patients treated rose to approximately 23 000. This significant increase in patient visits overwhelmed available space and forced patients, equipment, and care into every corner of the EC.

Many patients presenting to the EC are sicker than in years past, requiring more time-consuming assessments and testing. In fact, nearly 20% of Scotland Memorial's EC patients require hospital admission in order to treat their illnesses. Over 60% of all inpatients are admitted through the EC. These numbers indicate that the EC has become the hospital's "front door." Compounding the problems caused by lack of EC space was that inpatient hospital beds were often full. The patients who need to be admitted from the EC had nowhere to go, thus exacerbating the Center's capacity limitations for patients requiring treatment.

To address the growing need, Scotland Health Care System approved a multifaceted project that included renovating and expanding the Emergency Center. The first grant from The Duke Endowment provided capital funding for the structural expansion of the EC. The EC increased from 6400 square feet to over 24 000 square feet along with growing from 14 curtained bays to 20 private rooms. Additionally, the new EC includes:

- A "fast track center" for nonurgent patients to receive care.
- A second triage and evaluation room to permit patients to be assessed more quickly.

- Two separate trauma rooms, offering greater privacy for patients and their families.
- An expanded waiting room.
- A separate pediatrics waiting area to protect children from the potentially traumatic experience of an EC waiting area.
- A modernized and expanded nurse's station that increases the visibility to patient rooms and houses computers and modern communication equipment.
- A quiet, private space for families coping with life-threatening illness, injury, or death of a loved one.

A second grant from The Duke Endowment helped fund the cost of hardware, software, and employee and physician training required for implementation of a new Emergency Center Patient Tracking and Information System that will go online August 14, 2007. This comprehensive system will result in increased patient safety and quality of care, improved provider efficiencies, and decreased patient waiting times. Benefits of a tracking and information system include:

- Identifying a patient's physical location and the status of his or her examination and diagnosis with the touch of a computer screen.
- Eliminating breakdowns in communication and long wait-times in the multi-step process of physician examination, order writing, and order completion.
- Reducing errors from illegible handwriting through touch screen technology.
- Diminishing misdirected lab requests and misplaced lab results.
- Monitoring and advising patients from outside of the EC through off-site access to patient records.

The expansion and renovation of the EC, along with the requisite changes, and the renovation of acute care bed space was a major project for Scotland Memorial Hospital. Through this initiative the citizens of the Scotland area receive quality, compassionate emergency care 24 hours each day, 7 days a week, in a facility that offers them privacy and security while accommodating the equipment and staff needed to serve them. The multifaceted project has had a significant impact on the health and economic well-being of Scotland Memorial Hospital and the community.

Karen Gainey, marketing coordinator, and Becca Hughes, foundation director, of Scotland Health Care System contributed to this profile.