

Emergency care gets significant upgrade

Fort Hamilton Hospital handles more patients more quickly.

By **Hannah Poturalski**
Staff Writer

HAMILTON – The emergency department at Fort Hamilton Hospital is now better equipped to handle higher volumes with a faster turnaround following a major expansion and renovation nearly two years in the making.

Dr. Marcus Romanello, chief medical officer at Fort Hamilton Hospital, said the hospital now has 35 emergency beds with the capacity for as many as 60,000 patients per year. The annual average has been about 40,000 visits during the past three years.

“Five-thousand square feet, \$5 million and a much more welcoming environment,” Romanello said, who also serves as medical director of the emergency department.

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Shanita Klenk, a nurse in the Emergency Department of Fort Hamilton Hospital in Hamilton, talks about the recent \$5 million in renovations and an expansion that added 5,000 square feet to the hospital's facility (shown below). GREG LYNCH / STAFF

Fort Hamilton Hospital Emergency Department Open House

When: 6:30 to 10 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 19

Where: 630 Eaton Ave., Hamilton

What: Tours and Breakfast-to-Go

Who: Open to community and hospital staff



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The construction project began in August 2012 with the addition of 5,000 square feet.

The two-part expansion and renovation has consisted of: new five-bed, fast-track unit with renovated nursing station and medication cart; new stat lab for processing rapid tests; new four-bed behavioral health unit; new ambulance squad break room; new decontamination area; a separate sexual assault exam room away from the busy hallways; and renovated main nursing station, according to Romanello.

To fund the project, \$1.7 million in donations were raised with a remaining \$3.3 million invested by the hospital.

All the new and renovated rooms have been fully utilized since January. Romanello said all but two of the emergency rooms are now private one-bed rooms.

“We gave up potential beds in favor of increased privacy,” Romanello said.

Shanita Klenk, who’s been a nurse in the emergency department for eight years, said the environment has improved significantly since the renovations began two years ago. She said the emergency department is now better equipped to handle higher patient volumes.

“The flow seems to go a

lot better and quicker for the patient,” Klenk said. “The experience is better for them.”

Klenk described the department as “cozy and comfy” prior to renovations and said there’s now much more space for the hospital staff and patients to move around in. She said as well as being more spacious, the department now features a modern look.

Elizabeth Long, spokeswoman for Kettering Health Network, said the hospital used earth tones – browns and greens – around the renovated emergency department to induce a “healing environment” and “calming effect.”

“It looks more vibrant and cleaner; it does a lot more for aesthetics,” Klenk said. “We needed it and it looks great. Everything seems to be functioning and flowing well.”

Romanello said the department’s fast-track unit – which opened last September – has five beds used during the peak hours of 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Patients with minor injuries and illnesses, such as an ankle sprain or ear ache, are treated in this section to keep acute care rooms available for emergencies.

Romanello said about a third of the emergency visits fit the “minor care” description.

“The beds are smaller, more mobile for the sitting position because

there’s more in and out,” Romanello said.

Romanello said the intake process for patients has also been significantly improved. The new emergency department lobby features a nurse out front, rather than a registrar, in order to immediately assess the person’s injuries and symptoms and assign them a patient bed.

Romanello said this has attributed to the hospital’s average time of five minutes for the patient to be in a bed, and daily average of less than 10 minutes to be seen by a medical provider.

“We do care first and worry about registration later,” Romanello said, adding nurses then use portable computers to collect insurance and registration information.

That is one of many examples of how the department has implemented “lean health care,” or the process of eliminating waste while producing a quality product in the most efficient manner, according to the hospital.

Other “lean” features in the emergency department include a separate drug inventory system within the fast-track unit for minor drugs, and a reorganization of supply rooms to keep the most critical and frequently used medications out front, with rarely used items stocked away.

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