



Story by Theresa Cassidy. Renderings courtesy of Children's Hospital & Medical Center.

Physicians can see their patients all in one place. Parents will only have to register once. Siblings will have a place to play while waiting.

And the city's youngest patients with the most complicated health issues will have to take just one ride to one building to get all the health care they need in a day.

Those are just a few of the many benefits of the new Specialty Pediatric Center being unveiled Sept. 1 at Children's Hospital & Medical Center at 84th Street and West Dodge Road. The new center will bring together more than 30 outpatient specialty clinics under one roof.

"This is a brand new, modern facility designed from the ground up for the care of children," said Dr. John W. Sparks, a neonatologist and senior academic advisor for Children's, who is also chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and associate dean for pediatric affairs.

"The center is very much a convenience for the families," said Sparks. "They don't have to drive around to multiple locations to get their care. They can come to one location and get to know it well."

This is especially important for children with multiple medical issues, he noted.

"If they need to see multiple specialists in one day, they can see them all here, and it doesn't wear the kids out. It's hard work for these kids to be seen by a lot of people."

Physicians are excited about the center because of the opportunities to collaborate and coordinate to provide better medical care. They're also looking forward to having enhanced lab facilities that occupy the building's top floor, Sparks added.

The new lab will occupy 11,500 square feet of space, said Vanessa Walls, Vice President of Ambulatory Services. While the current lab is slightly smaller, one of the primary advantages of the new space is the ability to locate lab offices in a single, common location. In the past, these offices have been spread throughout the Children's campus.

Clinical pathology, microbiology, virology, and molecular diagnostics will also be housed in the new lab area.

"Children with unusual medical problems require sophisticated lab support," said Sparks. "It's a major advantage for us to have a laboratory connected with the inpatient and outpatient facility."

When children come to have blood work or other tests done, they'll find more wiggle room as well.

"If kids are sent here for lab draws, there is one outpatient draw station," said Walls. "The new lab will have four collection rooms for blood draws, and a separate bathroom for urine specimens."

All of these rooms will be located on the first floor for patients' and parents' convenience, Walls added.

When those lab tests are completed, the Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system at Children's will allow for quick posting of results to patient records, making them immediately available to physicians, nurses and staff who need to review and process them.

"The clinics will be in the new building, but the staff and physician offices will be in the pavilion," Walls explained. EMR allows staff and physicians to access the records immediately and simultaneously.

The EMR system updates in real time, so lab results are available more quickly. When a patient goes from one specialist to the next, the revised record is available to the next doctor.

"Before we had EMR, we had a different chart for each specialist. Now they're all combined into one," said Walls.

Among the clinics relocating to the new building are two that have been located off-campus: endocrinology, now located at 78th and Chicago streets, and pediatric orthopedics, located about two miles from Children's.

In addition, the UNMC College of Dentistry is adding a pediatric dental office at Children's, Walls said. They also will continue to see patients at the J.P. Lord School on the UNMC campus.

One of the conveniences the staff is looking forward to is the

modular office configuration. In the new building, several specialists will be using the same space, she said. If a doctor isn't in, another specialist can use that space.

"We designed the building to be as flexible and multi-functional as possible," said Walls.

Parents can look forward to new conveniences as well. One-stop patient registration is one of them.

"Patients will be able to register in one place so they don't have to check in with so many people," Walls said.

A heated, covered car seat fitting area will be located in the lower level of the parking garage. A fitting specialist will meet the family in the area to select and install the right car seat for their child's special needs.

Another family highlight is the new Kids Camp -- a play area for siblings of patients.

"In pediatrics, when you have a patient appointment, you have the patient, a parent or two, and usually at least one sibling," Walls explained. The sibling usually gets bored while waiting, and parents get distracted.

"Now the siblings will have a place to play while the patient is being seen," said Walls. Parents won't be as distracted and can focus better on what's happening during the appointment.

"It will be a better experience for everyone," Walls said.

Down the road, the center's new infusion center is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2011. This area is set aside for children needing chemotherapy, growth hormones, or other drugs that are administered intravenously.

"Most of these kids are ambulatory," said Walls. "They don't want to sit for several hours while getting their medication."

It will also have rooms for those patients who don't feel well and just want to rest while being treated, she added.

Grand opening celebrations for the new center are planned for the week of Aug. 23 with a public open house scheduled for the afternoon of Sunday, Aug. 29. It will be open for patient care on Sept. 1.

There are a few centers like this elsewhere in the country, Sparks said, but none are located near Omaha.

"It's a unique facility for the heartland region," he said. ☺

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