



Aligned to Heal the Spine

Nebraska Spine Hospital stresses convenience and expertise in serving back-pain sufferers



When back pain flares, even a few steps to treatment can be a few too many. That's why specialists at Alegent Health Immanuel Medical Center have built a "hospital within a hospital" right inside Immanuel's doors to provide a one-stop continuum of care for those seeking relief from their back pain.

The Nebraska Spine Hospital opened in August 2010 on the Immanuel campus, 6901 North 72nd Street. It is a joint venture with the surgeons of the Nebraska Spine Center, Alegent Health and Health Inventures.

H.R. Woodward, M.D., chairman of the board, is one of seven nationally recognized spine surgeons at Nebraska Spine Hospital. He led the efforts to ensure the hospital would be created with the latest technologies available for specialized spinal surgery.

Dr. Woodward said he's been working in earnest on creating the hospital for the past year and a half, guiding the plans through political and legislative changes that finally made it viable. But the vision for the treatment center goes back much farther than that. While going through files to prepare for an office move this year, he discovered a letter from several Alegent officials outlining their desire for a spinal hospital. That letter, he said, was dated 1992.

As plans moved ahead in 2009 and 2010, it became clear that the idea of building the hospital within Immanuel made much more sense instead of building a separate, stand-alone facility, Woodward said.

"My partners and I were already doing a lot of complex surgeries at Immanuel," he explained. The two operating rooms they were using "had more equipment and more sophisticated imaging and support facilities than some of the other hospitals. And we needed backup from our other medical colleagues in the basic primary care specialties if anything went wrong during surgery or recovery."

Building on an already-strong foundation, the Nebraska Spine Hospital

has six operating rooms, complete with O-Arm and Stealth technology and intra-operative CT technology, said Woodward. It has its own pre-op, recovery and post-op rooms, as well as 17 patient rooms. These rooms are currently set up as private rooms, but can be configured for double occupancy if the demand grows.

However, Dr. Woodward added, the vast number of people with back problems don't need – and shouldn't have – back surgery. Those patients can seek treatment at the Back Clinics at both Immanuel Medical Center and Lakeside Hospital. These clinics, operated by Alegent's Back and Spine Institute, opened in July 2010.

Patients get started with their care by calling one number – 717-BACK (2225). Whether they get treatments and interventions at the Back Clinic, or are referred to the Nebraska Spine Hospital to be evaluated for surgery, their primary care physician will be kept up-to-date on their progress through periodic updates and progress reports.

"At the Back Clinics, patients are directed to the most appropriate level of care," said Ann Schumacher, vice president and chief operating officer of Alegent Health Immanuel Medical Center. She also is vice chairman of the board of the Nebraska Spine Hospital.

Immanuel has an extensive database of outcomes and research in back pain, Schumacher noted. "Surgeons at our hospital know what works and doesn't. They are very clear about who's a candidate for surgery and who isn't. They have really perfected that over the years."

The way the Nebraska Spine Hospital works with the Back Clinics ensures that everything "flows together," said Woodward. "It's a collaboration with non-surgical providers as well. The continuum of care is smoother. Patients have a better road map for their treatment."

"We were hearing from other physicians that we needed to do something for back pain patients," Schumacher said. "There was no clear pathway for them to navigate through multiple treatment

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resources. Now we've made it clear for all of them, and it only takes one phone call to get started."

Same-day appointments are offered to those who need immediate relief. The clinics are located right inside the front doors of their hospitals so patients don't have to walk far while in pain. And as treatment progresses, the next station or specialist is only a few steps away from the last, making it easier for both patients and family members to navigate the system.

Services provided in the Back Clinics include care coordination, physical rehabilitation, massage, medical acupuncture, aquatics, yoga, surgical readiness and a chronic pain support group.


These Alegent Health Back and Spine Clinics are currently available on the Immanuel and Lakeside campuses, said Schumacher. Dedicated parking for the clinics and spine hospital is under construction at Immanuel.

Alegent plans to eventually have a Back Clinic on each of its campuses in the Omaha Metro area. They also hope to periodically offer public seminars about prevention and treatment of back pain.

The Nebraska Spine Hospital has achieved certification by the Joint Commission as well as the Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. It also has earned a "Blue Distinction" certification from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. Other certifications are pending.

Schumacher said Alegent has been contacted by many national payors and employers who want to send their patients to the hospital and back clinics for care.

"That's because there is no one else who provides the coverage that we have. We have everything integrated, and it's state of the art."

"The Nebraska Spine Hospital is a phenomenal accomplishment," said Schumacher. "It's something we're very, very proud of. We're doing something that's very needed in this community. It fits under the larger umbrella of taking the guesswork out of managing back pain for physicians and patients. Patients will have absolutely the best care from an integrated team dedicated to serving their back and spine needs." 

For more information on the Back & Spine Institute, go to www.alegent.com/Back&Spine. To make an appointment, call 717-BACK. The Nebraska Spine Hospital is online at www.nebraskaspinehospital.com.

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