

Methodist University Hospital Begins Emergency Department Expansion

By Jennifer Johnson Backer

Methodist University Hospital has begun construction on a \$33.5 million expansion and renovation of its emergency department.

[Jamie Carter](#), interim CEO for Methodist University Hospital, said the aging facility isn't large enough to accommodate the hospital's growing number of emergency department visitors.

He estimates the Methodist University Hospital emergency department was originally built to handle roughly 30,000 to 40,000 visitors per year. According to Methodist University Hospital data, emergency department visits grew 21.2 percent to about 57,000 visits in 2011, compared to 47,000 visits in 2007. The renovated and expanded emergency department will be able to treat up to 70,000 patients annually.

The new emergency department entrance on the Eastmoreland Avenue side of the hospital will become the main entrance to the hospital. The completed two-story emergency department will add 93,000 square feet of new space, in addition to 6,200 square feet of renovated space. Total patient treatment areas will grow to 54, compared with 38 in the original structure.

The project was approved by the Tennessee Health Services and Development Agency last fall and is expected to be completed next summer.

Emergency department rooms have continued to grow at Methodist University Hospital and Shelby County despite the national health care overhaul. The Affordable Care Act is designed to place an emphasis on expanding preventative care delivered by primary care physicians to keep patients with chronic, rather than acute conditions, out of emergency rooms.

An August 2012 report published by Cyril Chang, a professor of economics and director of the Methodist Le Bonheur Center for Healthcare Economics at the University of Memphis highlighted the problems associated with the non-urgent emergency department use in Shelby County and Tennessee. Non-urgent visits do not require immediate medical care within 12 hours and can be treated at a clinic or doctor's office.

Many local hospital emergency departments have become a last resort provider of primary care for people who cannot afford health care. While others rely on emergency department visits because they believe they can get high-quality care without waiting for an appointment. Studies show these non-urgent emergency department visits contribute to overcrowding and place both financial and logistical burdens on hospitals.

Shelby County residents made some 176,933 non-urgent emergency department visits in 2009, according to Chang's August 2012 report. Non-urgent visits made up about 52.1 percent of the total 339,288 emergency department visits that year, state data show.

The University of Memphis report also pointed out significant racial and ethnic disparities in non-urgent and primary-care sensitive visits in Shelby County, with black residents having rates of non-urgent and primary-care sensitive visits per 1,000 people more than three times that of white Shelby County residents.

Other emergency department expansions also are underway in Shelby County. Last week, [Baptist Memorial Health Care Corp.](#) broke ground on a \$14.1 million pediatric emergency department at Baptist Memorial



The renovated and expanded emergency department at Methodist University Hospital will be able to treat as many as 70,000 patients annually, up from 30,000 to 40,000.

(Methodist University Hospital)

Hospital for Women that will open in spring 2015. The move is the second phase of a long-term plan to transition pediatric services across campus from Baptist Memorial Hospital-Memphis to Baptist Memorial Hospital for Women.

Methodist Le Bonheur Germantown Hospital also is in the midst of an expansion that will add an additional 4,000 square feet to the existing emergency department. The expansion will add a second floor above the emergency department to add space and allow room for future expansion. Hospital officials say the Methodist Le Bonheur Germantown Hospital emergency department renovation and addition will take 10 to 11 months to complete.

Methodist University Hospital's Carter says the hospital's expanded two-story emergency department will also be able to accommodate future growth and renovations of the medical center's acute care treatment rooms.

"The new front that opens off Bellevue will allow us to expand upward as well when the time comes," he said. "With where we are located on this city block, that's our only option for replacing acute care beds in the future."