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*Hospital CEO: Most services won't be cut*

# St. Luke's says goal is efficiency

John Kee says he's been asked the same worried question 60 times since he took the reins of St. Luke's Wood River Medical Center in May 2010. The phrasings may vary but the concern is constant: Can the Wood River Valley, having a population of only 20,000, sustain a full-size hospital, or will services need to be cut back?

The 110,000-square-foot hospital south of Ketchum operates a 24-hour emergency department, inpatient and outpatient surgery, diagnostics, maternity services, physical and occupational therapy, mammography, intensive care and medical/surgical units. St. Luke's opened the \$32-million hospital in 2000, using \$18 million in donations to pay for a majority of construction costs, with St. Luke's paying most of the remaining costs.

The concern is only natural considering that Kee, CEO of the Wood River hospital and former CEO of St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center in Twin Falls, started making changes soon after his arrival. These changes have yet to fully play out but include price reductions for elective services while limiting the time that specialty services are offered.

However, he maintains, the hospital's basic scope of services won't be cut back. He said the hospital's 24-hour ER, general surgery, radiology, laboratory and other basic services aren't at risk.

"We'll still be delivering babies in two years," he said.

Kee said some hospital workers will be asked to separate their time between Wood River Medical Center and other St. Luke's hospitals. He said only one worker has been asked to do this so far—the director of clinical support services, Jo Dee Alverson—but others are to come. He said the others are yet to be chosen but it will include those in management.

Alverson said she wasn't "forced" to work two to three days a week at St. Luke's Twin Falls hospital. "I offered to go down and help," she said, adding that she took the opening for an emergency-preparedness coordinator at that hospital. Kee said Alverson is working toward a graduate degree in that field, making it a "great example" of using talents where they're needed. "It makes both hospitals more efficient," said Mike Reno, interim CEO of the Twin Falls hospital.

Sharon Kensinger, chief nursing officer of patient-care services at St. Luke's Boise Regional Medical Center, said the Boise, Wood River and Twin Falls hospitals would all be sharing workers. She said both the Wood River and Twin Falls hospitals have trouble retaining employees for more than three years because of their small size. She



said the new arrangement allows those like Alverson to grow without leaving St. Luke's, whereas workers have often earned a few years experience and then left for larger metropolitan hospitals that offer more opportunities.

Wood River surgeon Martin Durtschi said it's going to become common for St. Luke's workers, especially specialty doctors like pediatricians, to split their time among Boise, Twin Falls and Wood River as the St. Luke's Health System of southern Idaho becomes more unified. He said that will benefit the valley because it currently can't employ these specialists—there isn't enough business to keep them busy. This way, they'll come through on a set interval, providing the service without the cost of paying a full-time salary.

Is Twin Falls a threat? "Categorically wrong" were the words that Kee used to describe the rumor that the new Twin Falls hospital would replace some Wood River Medical Center services.

"I can't think of a single patient currently served by Wood River that will need to go to Twin Falls after the new hospital is opened," Durtschi said about the new hospital, set to open in three months.

He said Blaine County residents will benefit from Twin Falls because the new hospital will offer services previously available in only Boise, or even Salt Lake City.

Reno said an example would be the Mountain States Tumor Institute, a 34,000-square-foot cancer clinic with twice the former number of medical and radiation oncology examination rooms. He said patients used to travel out of state for the advanced radiation-therapy treatment—causing less collateral damage to non-cancerous parts of the body—that the new Twin Falls hospital will offer.

He said the hospital would also include a heart-care unit, an infant-care unit for those in critical condition and a rehabilitation unit for those with neurological problems needing "intense rehab in a controlled environment."

"Having such a robust neighbor to the south is a great advantage," Durtschi said.