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## St. Joe's unveils updated emergency room

*Renovation includes more places for emergency treatment, new waiting area*

A waiting area dedicated to emergency room patients is a key feature of an almost million-dollar renovation St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Lewiston recently completed and showcased Tuesday at an open house.

The hope, however, is the special waiting area will get little use because the addition of more trauma and emergency treatment rooms will generally be able to handle the patient load, which has increased by 10 percent in five years to 28,000 a year, said Misty Robertson, director of emergency services at St. Joe's.



That volume is expected to grow even more as the sagging economy forces people out of work and makes it impossible for them to afford preventive care, Robertson said. St. Joe's has 11 rooms for patients in its emergency room now including five trauma rooms, compared with eight rooms prior to the renovation, counting three for trauma.

The trauma rooms are larger than the regular rooms and have special equipment to treat patients injured in falls, vehicle collisions or other accidents.

The increased size of trauma rooms allows for more doctors and nurses to be working on a patient

at once, boosting the likelihood the patients can reach definitive treatment, usually surgery, within an hour of getting hurt, something that's key to their survival, Robertson said.

When patients arrive other than by ambulance, they are seen by a triage nurse, who determines if they need care from the emergency room or an adjacent minor care clinic.

Ideally those who need the emergency room are taken directly to their beds, and a hospital employee with a laptop computer registers them in the place where they are getting treatment, Robertson said.

If the emergency room is full, patients are taken to the new waiting area where a nurse can easily monitor them after they are admitted.

The waiting area is inside the emergency room and not visible to those entering the hospital's north side lobby where emergency room patients used to wait.

Besides expanding the size of the emergency room from about 7,800 to 9,200 square feet, the hospital also shifted and increased the number of nurses to match staffing levels with the usual flow of patients.

Typically the emergency room is busiest between 3 p.m. and midnight and the hospital has added two nurses and assigned more of its about 30 specially trained emergency room nurses to those times, Robertson said.

Robertson didn't quantify exactly how much faster at providing treatment the hospital hopes to get. The average length of time between when patients arrive and are discharged or are admitted to the hospital is 2.6 hours, the same as the average for Idaho and less than a national average of about eight hours, Robertson said. "We want to be the best, not just average."

The expansion was made possible by moving the hospital's pharmacy and gift shop from the main to the second floor. The gift shop expanded by 400 square feet in the relocation, said Doug Barton, a spokesman for St. Joseph.