In this issue:

Opening Day

A Legacy of Leadership

Meritus Health Names New CEO
Dear Neighbors,

Perhaps it is the sun-filled lobby or the fusion of healthcare services in one location. Whatever the stimulus, Meritus Medical Center is experiencing an uptick in patient admissions and emergency department (ED) visits.

Before the move, hospital administrators closely observed Western Maryland Regional Medical Center’s move in Cumberland. Like Meritus Medical Center, Western Maryland Regional Medical Center has a similar bed capacity and serves a multi-state, rural population. When Western Maryland Regional Medical Center moved into its new location in November of 2009, their patient numbers declined. Meritus Medical Center is experiencing the opposite.

Since late December and into January, and February the number of patients coming to our emergency department has significantly increased, from a daily average of 190 to 250+. Similarly, the number of patients admitted daily is averaging nearly a third more than what was forecasted. Rest assured, the hospital’s design and staffing was planned to easily accommodate a greater number of patients than we saw at the old hospital. However, because of the increase in demand, we are fine-tuning our operational plans and stepping up staff recruitment.

Enhancements Accommodate More Patients

Several significant changes from Washington County Hospital to Meritus Medical Center make it possible to care for more patients. A major improvement is single-patient rooms. At the old hospital, 10% of the rooms were unusable at any given time due to infection control or same-sex room assignments. We are better able to minimize delays from having to move patients to different rooms.

The ED is nearly twice as large as our previous department and includes enhancements such as an in-house CAT scanner and close proximity of frequently used services like imaging and the medical lab. On the hospital’s inpatient floors, mini nurses’ stations are strategically placed at the points of an interior triangle, offering nurses a direct view and quick access into patient rooms. These are just some examples of our effective and efficient patient care.

Expansion and Staffing

While equipped to serve more patients, we also have an eye to the future. A thirty-bed unit on the hospital’s fifth floor is already “shelled,” meaning that we can prepare the rooms to accept patients with minimal construction work. Meritus Medical Center will work closely with the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC), who regulates state hospitals, to determine a staged approach for increasing our bed capacity in the near future. We recently received approval from the MHCC to open eleven additional beds. They will open on April 18. We also have finalized plans and are preparing construction of 300 additional parking spaces on the Meritus Medical Center/Robinwood Professional Center campus to accommodate the high volume of patients and visitors we are seeing.

Although sooner than expected, Meritus Medical Center is in full recruitment mode. We will hire additional registered nurses and other healthcare positions throughout the coming months. We take pride in being a major employer in Washington County and plan to continue to contribute to its economic growth.

We have built it and you have come. Meritus Medical Center opens its arms to all tri-state residents and shares in the excitement of providing twenty-first century healthcare to our community.

With best wishes for your good health,

James P. Hamill
President and CEO

Meritus Health
Corporate Communications
11116 Medical Campus Road
Hagerstown, MD 21742

This publication in no way seeks to diagnose or treat illness or to serve as a substitute for professional medical care. Please see your physician if you have a health problem.

MeritusHealth.com
Opening Day

For the first time since 1904, Hagerstown has a new hospital. On Saturday, December 11, 2010, Washington County Hospital staff and a fleet of thirty ambulances moved 165 patients to a new location on Medical Campus Road. Hospital personnel meticulously planned each minute of the move, from a 5:15 am video conference about the patient move plan to the last patient transfer eight hours later.

The first department to hang a “closed for business” sign was the hospital’s emergency department. At 6:00 am, the doors of Meritus Medical Center’s emergency department opened for all new emergency cases. One half hour later, Trudy Sasscer of Hagerstown, was the first patient to make the two-mile trip down the road to the new hospital. “I told my kids I’m going to be number one,” she said.

By 1:00 pm, only two patients remained at Washington County Hospital—both were in the special care nursery. Two hours later, the infants were transferred out, and patient care ceased at Washington County Hospital.

Historic and Bittersweet

After moving into its Antietam Street location in 1912, Washington County Hospital built five wings and expanded or renovated its facilities dozens of times. In February 2008, the hospital broke ground at Medical Campus Road and began the largest construction project in its 100-year history.

For many area residents and staff, leaving 251 Antietam Street was bittersweet. While some eyed the future, others looked back wistfully. “My mom and dad were born here, I was born here, my five children were born here and my nine grandkids were born here,” said hospital employee JeNelle McKee. “I have a lot of good memories here.”

Trauma surgeon and chief of staff Marc Kross, MD, did little to hide his enthusiasm over the larger and technologically advanced hospital. “I couldn’t sleep last night. I was too excited. We finally have a cutting-edge medical center. It’s a Ferrari, a Lamborghini and a Rolls Royce all rolled into one.”

The Look of Today, and Tomorrow

The new hospital was designed with input from physicians, nurses and staff, as well as patients and families. All 268 inpatient rooms are private with views of the countryside, and feature sleeping space for family members, Internet access and flat screen TVs. The triangular floor plan reduces the number of steps nurses travel to each patient room, while a pneumatic tube system transports medications, lab specimens and blood products throughout the hospital and Robinwood Professional Center. Additional operating rooms and catheterization labs, along with state-of-the-art imaging equipment and patient safety technology create an environment for optimal acute care.

The success of the move was a testament to the hundreds of nurses, physicians and administrators who planned a new hospital, and prepared for its relocation over the course of seven years.
Meritus Health Names New CEO

Meritus Health recently announced that Mr. Joseph P. Ross, FACHE, has been named the new president and chief executive officer (CEO) of Meritus Health and all of its business components, including Meritus Medical Center. Mr. Ross will succeed James P. Hamill, who plans to retire this year.

Mr. Ross has nearly 35 years of experience in the healthcare industry, most recently as president and CEO of Shore Health System of Maryland in Easton, Maryland. During his more than 15 years at Shore Health, Mr. Ross created a system-wide approach through the merger of Memorial Hospital at Easton and Dorchester General Hospital. Prior to leading Shore Health System, Mr. Ross served as president and CEO of Mercy Medical Center in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for eight years. He has also held administrator positions at Philipsburg General Hospital in Philipsburg, Pennsylvania, and Wetzel County Hospital in New Martinsville, West Virginia. In addition, he completed his administrative residency and served as assistant administrator at West Virginia University Hospital in Morgantown, West Virginia.

“We are extremely pleased that Joe has joined Meritus Health. He brings an understanding of Maryland’s healthcare system and a proven track record in addressing critical issues facing healthcare organizations today. His experience, strategic vision, and financial skills, combined with an understanding of patient care needs, medical staff concerns, and employee issues will help Meritus Health continue to provide premiere healthcare services to the region,” explains George C. Newman II, PhD, MD, chairman of the Meritus Health Board of Directors.

Mr. Ross received his undergraduate education at West Virginia University, earning a bachelor of arts degree in political science. He also earned a master’s degree in hospital and health system administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is a fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE), a member of the board of directors of the Terrapin Healthcare Insurance Company, a member of the board of directors of Leadership Maryland, a member of the Health Care CEO Roundtable, and a member of the board of directors of the Mid-Shore Community Foundation. He is married and has four children.

The Meritus Health Board of Directors worked with a national executive search firm to conduct a nationwide search for the candidate to best serve the community and lead Meritus Health.

Mr. Ross, formally begins his new role as president and CEO on Monday, April 4, and says he eagerly looks forward to joining the Meritus Health family. “I am excited to become a part of Meritus Health and am very impressed with the work that’s been done to enhance healthcare services for the Hagerstown community and the region.”
James P. Hamill
A Legacy of Leadership

“Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

They persevere in good times and bad. They check their ego at the door and use the word “we” with success and “I” in times of failure. Their passion is infectious and they give more than they take every day. Great leaders are tireless, built of character and possess the courage to make tough decisions.

With nearly forty years of healthcare experience, the construction of a $294 million regional medical center, expansion of Robinwood Professional Center and the development of new clinical service lines, James Hamill is retiring from his role as president and chief executive officer of Meritus Health.

“It is easy to work for a person who always expected the best in people and sought ways to motivate them,” stated Raymond Grahe, chief financial officer of Meritus Health. For ten years, Grahe experienced the foresight, resourcefulness, discipline and humility of Jim Hamill. Grahe sees Meritus Medical Center as Mr. Hamill’s legacy, but he also credits the vision of an integrated health system to the departing chief executive officer.

“Jim is the best leader I’ve ever worked with,” remarked Meritus Medical Center architect Bill Heun. “His biggest concern was with the patient environment and how the hospital would look to the community. His office is the smallest office of any CEO I’ve ever worked with,” said Heun. “That was his last priority. He wanted the money go to patients.”

Executing the vision of Meritus Medical Center was not easy. “Building a new hospital was a culture change for the community,” said Grahe. “We were taking a 100-year-old institution and replacing it.” During the largest fundraising campaign in Washington County’s history, Mr. Hamill faced opposition to building Meritus Medical Center.

According to Grahe, Mr. Hamill had weekly meetings and took individuals on tours. “His approach was how do I work with you, and how do we get this done,” said Grahe.

“The construction and completion of this hospital is a huge credit to him,” said George Newman, II, MD, chairman of the Meritus Health board. “The first months of operations have been spectacular. The planning that went into the hospital has proven to be very successful.” Dr. Newman sees the Legacy - continued page 7
Men and women who are having life-threatening heart attacks now have a new life-saving tool in all the local ambulances that transport them: field EKG transmissions.

The Meritus Healthcare Foundation awarded a grant to install the modems and software on all ambulances that bring heart patients to Meritus Medical Center. The Foundation’s initiative began two years ago at the Crystal Ball with the help of many doctors and donors. Now emergency medical services (EMS) personnel can take readings en route and send them wirelessly to doctors waiting at the Emergency Department.

“This is a beautiful thing,” said Brett Kane, clinical manager of the cardiac catheterization labs at Meritus Medical Center. “Our goal was to have every ambulance in our system equipped with an EKG capability, and now we are there.”

The hospital can also receive EKG transmissions from Frederick County, Md., and Franklin County, Pa., using the system, added Joan Fortney, administrative director of emergency and trauma services at Meritus Medical Center.

Emergency Department Chair Stephen Kotch, MD, who was present at a ceremony celebrating the acquisition of the final EKG capability, said the reduction in time to identify cardiac patients is critical when minutes count.

“This will give us early notice that will really help us lower door-to-balloon times,” he said. The “door-to-balloon” time is the period from when a cardiac patient enters the emergency room until the blocked arteries are reopened, and is a significant factor in patient success rates. Having the early verification that a stent is needed also allows medical teams to bypass the Emergency Department to bring patients directly to the Cardiac Cath Lab, saving precious time.

The new equipment will put Meritus Medical Center well within the 90 minutes recommended by the American Heart Association for stents to be prepared and completed for STEMI (Segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction) patients. Additionally, emergency and cardiac experts at Meritus Medical Center believe it will prepare the hospital to reach an anticipated 60-minute benchmark that the American Heart Association is poised to recommend.

“This is a life-saving improvement for cardiac patients,” said Laurie Sexton, interim director for the Meritus Healthcare Foundation.

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Health system receives favorable S&P rating

The health system recently received a revised credit profile from Standard & Poor’s (S&P). S&P revised Meritus Health’s rating outlook to stable from negative and affirmed its BBB- long-term rating.

“We’ve never been on sounder financial footing, and we remain one of the lowest-cost hospitals in the state of Maryland,” said James P. Hamill, president and CEO. “There are a lot of very positive things happening in the organization right now.”

Factors supporting the BBB- rating included an assessment of Meritus Health’s financial health:

- Operating results, characterized by a robust 4.7% operating margin;
- Dominant market share in Washington County; and
- Successful completion and occupancy of the replacement hospital, Meritus Medical Center, on time and on budget.
New to Meritus Health

Mark Sullivan, MD
Mark Sullivan, MD, has joined the medical staff of Meritus Medical Center specializing in thoracic surgery and general surgery. Thoracic surgery includes lung, esophageal, and cardiac procedures.

Dr. Sullivan comes to us from Pennsylvania where he was a thoracic surgeon at both Jefferson Regional Medical Center and Indiana Regional Medical Center. An experienced surgeon, Dr. Sullivan has specialized training in advanced laparoscopic surgery. His office is conveniently located in Robinwood Professional Center, suite 125, and he is now accepting new patients. He is fluent in both German and Spanish.

Call 301.714.4350 for more information.

Jerry Correces, MD
For patients with a cluster of medical conditions, Jerry Correces, MD, offers comprehensive evaluation and care in his Opal Court office. Dr. Correces treats patients with diabetes, hyperlipidemias (cholesterol disorders), hypertension, metabolic syndrome, sleep apnea, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and others.

Board-certified in internal medicine (adolescent and adult medicine), he provides several diagnostic services in his office, including pulmonary function tests for breathing disorders, and impedance cardiography for patients with known hypertension and heart disease. He also performs minor procedures such as biopsies, skin lesion removal, steroid injections related to tendonitis and bursitis, and trigger point injections for myofascial pain.

He speaks both English and Filipino and believes in offering individualized and holistic care, especially to patients with multiple medical conditions.

Call 301.797.4593 for more information.

Samuel Chan, MD
Board certified in internal medicine, Samuel Chan, MD, has been a part of the Hagerstown medical community and a member of the hospital medical staff for 23 years.

With a move date in April 2011, Dr. Chan will leave his Hager Park office space and join the practice of WillowWood Adult Medicine in Robinwood Professional Center. Alongside Doctors Delaportas, Tisdale and Ali, Dr. Chan will care for adolescent and adult patients.

Fluent in English and Spanish, Dr. Chan educates and counsels his patients on hypertension, high cholesterol and weight management. He also incorporates an understanding of wellness, mental health, medical ethics, women’s health, and geriatric health issues into his care for patients.

Call 301.714.4175 for more information.

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Green Initiative Yields Washington County Business Award

Solar panels and electric cars—going green can sound daunting. But breaking it down into its simplest form, going green means reducing waste, reusing what you can, and recycling what you cannot. On February 23, the 12th Annual Washington County Business Awards bestowed its “Going Green” honor to Meritus Medical Center for integrating “green” initiatives into its operating practices.

According to Deborah Addo Samuels, vice president of operations for Meritus Health, the interest to be more environmentally friendly came from employees. With the construction of a new hospital in the works, a “Green Team” was formed in 2008. Today, an ongoing Green Team still convenes.

“The award is an external validation of the energy and effort that our staff has put into going green,” commented Addo Samuels. “We went into this to be good stewards of the planet. Receiving the award is an added, unexpected bonus.”

The Green Team’s accomplishments are numerous and varied. Clearing out warehouse space generated nearly fifty tons of recycled paper, metal, and bulk material. The Green Team diverted, donated or recycled 96% of that waste. Nine truckloads of donated material went to Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore resulting in nearly $15,000 toward the building of a house (a quarter of the construction cost). During the construction of Meritus Medical Center, excavation was kept to a minimum and planted areas were designed to purify storm water runoff. On the inside of the new hospital, earth-friendly materials like paints free of volatile organic compounds and wood from renewable sources were used.

“There are limited resources and we should not take more than we need.”

Meritus Health continues its earth-friendly initiatives by holding on-campus farmer’s markets, reducing junk mail, using locally-grown produce—even giving hospital food scraps to a local pig farm.

The Washington County Business Awards also selected Meritus Healthcare Foundation as a finalist in the Nonprofit Impact Award category. The nonprofit award recognizes a local 501(c)(3) organization that improves the lives of those it serves. “The capital campaign was a community effort and an historic accomplishment for everyone who believed in the vision of a new medical center. We were so pleased to be recognized as one of the many impactful nonprofits who are doing great things for our community,” said Laurie Sexton, interim director of Meritus Healthcare Foundation.