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## **THE FUTURE OF SHORT-TERM STAY HOSPITALS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

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As health providers continue to meet the needs of their communities, new facility types and designs are being created. A growing number of large healthcare systems are extending their services to suburban communities through short-term stay hospitals in addition to ambulatory care centers. Government reimbursement policies are encouraging the shift from ambulatory care centers to short-stay hospitals. Unlike non-patient bed designed ambulatory care centers, short-term care centers are hospital-licensed facilities with beds.

Short-term stay hospitals provide essentially the same services as a large hospital but on a smaller scale. Many of these facilities contain an impressive array of services from primary to short-term acute care. Services not provided via the facilities are readily available through other components of the system. These facilities are the vanguards of integrated delivery systems that bring cost-effective, market-conscious and patient-friendly services to users who are increasingly separated from major centralized medical centers.

The facilities host a small number of patient beds and a large component of surgery and diagnostic and treatment services. The goal is to provide easily accessible hospital services on an outpatient basis. The following is a listing of typical components often used by national healthcare systems.

- *Patient Service Center*  
The patient service center serves as the first point of contact for patients and families. The center provides non-clinical services such as registration, counseling, case management and patient information systems. It also may provide routine pre-admission services such as chest x-ray and specimen collection.
- *Non-invasive Testing Center*  
Non-invasive testing ranges from imaging (i.e. radiography/fluoroscopy, mammography and CT) to "express" diagnostics (i.e. EKG, echocardiography, stress testing, pre-admit testing). Laboratory components may also be included in the testing center.

- *Urgent Care Center*  
An urgent care center provides minor emergency services including triage, examination, minor treatment, observation and possibly occupational medicine. If a critical healthcare need occurs, the patient will be transferred.
- *Invasive Treatment Center*  
Invasive treatments, such as outpatient surgery, cardiac catheterization, endoscopy, and pain management are performed within ambulatory procedure units. Typically, the unit will share a common preparatory and recovery area.
- *Short Stay Nursing*  
A short stay nursing unit provides patients requiring 24-hour and typically no more than 72-hour stays with medical observation and post surgical licensed beds.

The short-term stay design should incorporate a central point with a clearly identified entry allowing access to multiple services. The hospital's main outpatient services should be located directly adjacent to this common space. In some cases, a linear organization, with patient care areas located off a main open-ended corridor, provides less stressful wayfinding for patients and their families. The development of a growth chassis will allow surgery, diagnostic and treatment, and patient care areas to expand along designated growth avenues, creating flexibility for the future.

The new short-term stay hospitals are becoming a trend in the provision of healthcare services. Alternative healthcare facilities, such as short-term stay and ambulatory care, represent more than two-thirds of the healthcare construction market today. As we move into the next era of healthcare, we need to look toward meeting market needs, providing patient accessibility and above all creating flexible, effective facility designs.