

CASE STUDY 2

New Immediate Care Centers Improve Access to Quality Care

SWEDISH COVENANT HOSPITAL

Swedish Covenant Hospital is a 312-licensed-bed nonprofit teaching hospital that serves residents in Chicago's north and northwest side communities. It has two immediate care centers and includes cancer, cardiology, emergency, orthopedic, surgical, women's health, and wellness services. The organization has 2,200 employees, including more than 600 employed physicians. In 2015, the system reported \$286.1 million in total net patient revenue.

In 2013, Swedish Covenant Hospital began the process of establishing two new immediate care centers in Chicago's north side community. The initiative's objective was to increase access to quality care in the neighborhoods surrounding the hospital, many of which lacked viable convenient care alternatives. The new facilities—one in Sauganash and one in North Center—came online in July and August 2015, respectively.

According to Mark Newton, president and CEO at Swedish Covenant Hospital, there were a number of considerations behind the decision to build.

“We surveyed the market landscape and looked at life through the lens of a consumer. Obviously, the healthcare industry has a concentration on convenience, as evidenced by the Walgreens and CVS initiatives, so that's a factor that certainly impacted our strategic vision.”

Another element Swedish Covenant Hospital considered was the neighborhoods that it serves. “We looked at the demographics throughout our service area, and felt it was important for us to look at a 360-degree service area and consider how we create points of access that could provide convenient care in those communities at a distance from the hospital's core campus,” says Newton. “So these centers are all within our secondary service area.”

There were also strategic elements to the initiative related to emergency medical coverage. “One of our planning principles is that we put these within a service area where we get the 911 paramedics. Why is that important? If we had moved these sites four blocks in either direction, they would be in a different paramedic run, potentially sending patients to another hospital. And doing that would be breaking down the possibility of a fundamental new relationship.”

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Partner, acquire, or build new. As with many providers seeking to improve access to care, the decision for Swedish Covenant Hospital revolved around whether to partner, acquire, or build new. In the end, it decided to build new.

“We had conversations with current operators of immediate care facilities, and as we looked at their retail footprint and the way that they did site selection, we discovered it was different from the way that we did it,” says Newton. “We were looking at it through a lens of knowing the community and wanting to reinforce brand identity within the community as opposed to just going to a place that has very high traffic patterns. We really have these as an extension of our medical group, so that we can provide an integrated continuum of care.”

Immediate care centers. Management and staffing for the immediate care centers falls under Swedish Covenant Medical Group, the hospital’s multispecialty medical organization. While management for the new facilities came from existing staff, the majority of clinical staff at the centers are new hires who have experience in urgent care and convenient care.

As would be expected for convenient care facilities, weekday hours are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with no appointment required. Weekend hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The range of services includes:

- Treatment for minor illnesses such as colds, flu, upset stomach, allergies, ear infections, and skin conditions

- Treatment for injuries such as sprains, broken bones, minor burns, and animal bites
- School and sport physicals
- Vaccinations
- Point of care laboratory work and x-rays

Because the centers are part of SCMG, patients are not limited to using its services in a convenient care context alone. They are able to establish a primary care relationship going forward.

Metrics to date. Given that the centers came online in late July and early August, activity levels are still building. Newton says each center is currently handling approximately 15 to 20 patients per day; each center has a capacity of approximately 60 patients per day.

Preliminary data on patient usage activity is also promising. Approximately 50% of patients are new to Swedish Covenant Hospital, and 40% have a relationship with one of SCMG’s primary care physicians in another office. “What this tells us is that the extended hours are critically important because it supplements your traditional primary care physician,” says Newton.

“My view is that this is going to take probably two years to stabilize financially. I actually think that they will build faster than the traditional physician practice, which takes three years.”

Case Study 2 (continued)

Plans for expansion. The current immediate care centers are part of an expansion plan that includes an additional two centers. While the locations have yet to be identified, the new centers will be placed within the Chicago communities that Swedish Covenant Hospital currently serves. The centers are expected to come online in approximately two years.

“We pride ourselves on creating market momentum, and to do that, we have to move quickly. I would not say that we’re early to market on this

overall concept. In fact, the concept for these centers has been around for a long time. But what is different is that they’re 1) extensions of the medical group, 2) extensions of the hospital, and 3) they’re deliberately placed in communities where there are no other existing alternatives.”

—Jonathan Bees