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## Valley hospital focuses on personal attention

**South Whitehall operation illustrates trend of doctors opening own facilities.**

By Ann Wazelek Of The Morning Call

For the first time in more than 30 years, area patients who need their gallbladder removed, hip replaced or an emergency diagnosis have a new choice in hospitals.

Dr. Yasin Khan, a pain specialist, this week opened Westfield Hospital, a three-story, for-profit hospital at 4815 Tilghman St. in South Whitehall Township. The newly constructed hospital has 26 beds, three operating rooms and a 24-hour emergency service.

The \$11.5 million facility was designed for patients who might stay one to three nights for minor procedures, including some back surgeries.

Its opening marks a growing trend among doctors building their own hospitals and surgery centers.

Referring to hotel-like attributes not available in all area hospitals, such as hardwood floors, flat-screen TVs and Internet access in most rooms, Khan said comfort and personal service are his goals.

Kahn said he wants to provide patients with a choice that falls between the area's smaller surgical centers and big hospitals.

"I feel strongly that a hospital should be less intimidating," he said. "If a patient can relax, half the battle [of recovery] is over."

Westfield received its license Monday and admitted patients Wednesday. The first three cases included two pain-relieving back surgeries with one-night stays and one outpatient back injection and diagnosis -- all patients of Khan's.

The hospital will accept all major health insurances and government programs after Medicare conducts a survey and approves Westfield for participation and payment. Patients can choose to go to Westfield, or their doctor can refer them there, the same way the process works at other hospitals.

The Westfield staff includes 30 nurses, technicians and others, as well as 25 doctors who also work at other area hospitals. Technology includes nuclear medicine, CT scanner, digital X-ray and portable computers.

Patients who come to the emergency room with conditions that require more advanced treatment than Westfield can provide, such as heart or brain surgery, will be transported by ambulance to a hospital that offers the service.

Westfield has contracts with Cetronia Ambulance Corps and three larger community hospitals: Lehigh Valley Hospital, St. Luke's and Sacred Heart.

Although the larger hospitals could lose business to Khan's center, he said talks with the competition have been amicable. LVH acknowledged that to be the case.

The nonprofit hospital industry has been more critical of specialty hospitals that compete for better-paying cases, such as orthopedic surgery, than it has of small general hospitals that accept Medicaid patients, Khan said.

Westfield will take all comers, he added, including walk-ins to a minor emergency center that Khan will continue to operate in a separate building in the same complex. The center is in addition to the hospital's full-service emergency room.

Dan Bair, the hospital's chief operating officer, said a big challenge for the small hospital will be to keep costs down by maximizing use of staff. Nurses, for example, may also help register new patients, he said.

For years in Pennsylvania and other states, few people were building hospitals because those already built were struggling to keep beds full and bills paid as HMOs tried to keep patients out, nurses were in short supply and advanced treatments required fewer overnight stays.

More recently, with baby boomers getting older and the population growing, doctors and other developers have begun building their own surgery centers and small hospitals. The move gives doctors more control and earning ability, but can create ethical conflicts too, if the physician owners refer patients for treatment they don't need.

Established hospitals worry that too much competition from doctor-run centers could leave them empty and unable to pay for more costly services and for the uninsured.

Westfield will have managers and a board of governors overseeing its operations, said Khan, who is the principal owner and chief executive.

Seven new hospitals have opened in Pennsylvania in the past five years, according to the state Department of Health. Most are specialty hospitals, catering to cancer patients, surgery or rehabilitation.

That list includes the 20-bed Surgical Specialty Center at Coordinated Health in Hanover Township, Northampton County. Opened last year by a group of orthopedic surgeons and St. Luke's, the center specializes in knee and hip replacements.

Westfield, with 45,000 square feet, is a general hospital, which means it handles all kinds of conditions and procedures. The last general hospital built in this region was the Allentown and Sacred Heart Hospital Center, now LVH-Cedar Crest, in Salisbury Township in 1974.

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