

# When Seconds Count

*a visionary approach to emergency center design*



3D rendering of lobby six months before construction



Actual photo of lobby after construction



**C**haos. Noise. Confusion. Long Waits. These are the mental images most of us associate with an emergency center. However, at Covenant HealthCare System, that's not the case. When entering Covenant's new Emergency Care Center (ECC), one notices a quiet atmosphere regardless of patient activity.

SSEO's team created a visionary paradigm in the design of Covenant's ECC. In response to dramatically undersized departments, the project goal was to help Covenant provide high-tech emergency treatment in an environment that cares for both the medical and the emotional needs of patients and their families. All this needed to occur in a facility offering greatly improved staffing and operational effectiveness. Key to this is a combined triage/registration system that reduces wait times in addition to maximizing comfort and privacy for patients and their families. Each part of the ECC was designed with the patient in mind.

When St. Luke's Hospital and Saginaw General Hospital merged to form Covenant HealthCare System, Covenant decided to combine patient volumes and build one replacement facility rather than continue to operate two separate (and outdated) emergency departments. Initial volume estimates predicted 60,000 patient visits per year. When the ECC actually opened, that figure rose to 75,000.

The ECC has separate ambulance and ambulatory entrances to decrease arrival congestion. Upon arriving in the lobby, patients are greeted and immediately directed to the combined triage/registration area. They are then taken to a treatment room that has been designed, equipped and staffed to meet their specific medical need. In many cases, registration is done at the patient's bedside rather than in the waiting room or designated registration area, which helps to relax and calm the patient. Replacing the traditional thin curtains, all 47 of the ECC's



Photography by Cris Burkhalter

treatment rooms are private and have closing glass doors and increased space for family. The waiting room is aesthetically pleasing and provides comfortable seating, abundant natural light and a fish tank for families.

Emergency visits are inherently stressful, and good design decisions can lead to measurable effects on patients and staff. As part of the design vision, SSOE's team produced digital building simulations to provide a sense of space, function, image and aesthetics for the ECC. Reviewing the simulations allowed Covenant to critique the actual layout and function of the space early in the design phase. Details that were once difficult to visualize — e.g., "How will the lobby look?" or "Where will ambulatory, acute, chronic and critical services be located?" — were analyzed before costly decisions were made.

Another welcome aspect of this design vision is increased staff recruitment opportunities.

When the ECC opened, Covenant found itself with nurses submitting employment applications. All were excited to work in an environment that offers a significant effect on their mental and physical well being.

Adaptable to the shifting needs of healthcare, Covenant's Emergency Care Center fulfills patient and staff needs and promotes flexibility by creating versatile spaces that respond to ever-changing medical situations, patient demographics and new technologies. •

## project highlights

- 45,000 sq. ft.
- 47 Treatment Rooms
- 14 Room Observation / Chest Pain Center
- Trauma Center
- Pediatric Care Center
- Urgent Care Center
- Fast Track Center
- Patient Capacity Volume: 75,000 up to 90,000 visits annually
- Programming: Freeman White Associates