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The changing health care climate South of Boston

Not so long ago, if a major health issue presented itself in the life of a South Shore, Cape Cod or South Coast resident, the most reasonable thing to do was to plan a trip to Boston. The thought being, it's just a short drive to some of the world's top medical facilities. The local hospitals were viewed as great for an x-ray or a quick outpatient procedure, or minor illness. Anything more involved and this was a stop on the way to the major teaching hospital.

Currently from South Coast and Cape Cod to Milton many of the hospitals are collaborating or partnering with major teaching organi-



zations. These affiliations are driving patient care expectations. This expectation is not only related to the top-rate medical care but also the state-of-the-art quality of the facilities. This combination of care and design within these organizations has enabled the patient and family to realize that the same high-level health care is now available in their own community.

Some of us may remember about 20 years ago when the thought was to have multiple hospitals merge and to affiliate with various doctors' groups. Then about 10 years ago the direction changed and organizations began shifting away from the unity approach. Today the mantra is "patient-centric," or bringing the care to the patient, as well as a homecare approach where the patient, after release from a hospital stay, is followed up on by caregivers to insure they are taking care of themselves. This approach, coupled with the latest in medical technology advances, is quickly changing the appearance of our healthcare delivery and care system.

Some of the recent improvements undertaken by these organizations include expanded and new emergency departments, encompassing observation units, diagnostic services, cancer care and specialized patient care services.

SouthCoast Health Systems – serving Fall River (Charleston Hospital), New Bedford (St. Luke's) and Wareham (Tobey Hospital) – has recently seen expansions in all areas of patient service. There is the recent completion of two new cancer centers and new patient care centers, which include expanded programs in cardiology, diagnostics, imaging and various treatments.

Cape Cod Healthcare (encompassing Cape Cod Hospital and Falmouth Hospital) services the residents and visitors of Cape Cod. Recently, the organization opened the Clark Cancer center, expanded and renovated the Intensive Care Unit, and expanded one patient care center and built another.

South Shore Hospital is a regional health care system and 318-bed acute medical center that provides outpatient, home health and hospice care for the residents of southeastern Massachusetts. Expansion recently included a new Outpatient Center in Hingham along with a new Patient Care tower.

Beth Israel Deaconess-Medical Center acquired Milton Hospital and just recently Plymouth Hospital (formerly Jordan Hospital). Milton added a new emergency department along with other patient services, while BIDH-Plymouth serves residents from 12 towns in Plymouth and Barnstable counties. The emergency department was just expanded and renovated, as was the NICU. In addition, a new outpatient medical building is about to open on campus.

It's not surprising that the well of medical expertise and innovation has spilled down from Boston along the South Shore and to the Cape. Enhancing the quality of the care experience is the foundation of the design process for healthcare, and it's inspiring to see just how thoroughly embraced this tenet is throughout many South Shore healthcare facilities. 