

ER/urgent care facility makes promise on bills

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USA TODAY NETWORK

EVANSVILLE — Along with the traditional speeches and shovel-to-dirt photo opp, Deaconess Health System’s groundbreaking Wednesday for the region’s first combined emergency room/urgent care facility offered a promise:
No more hitting Tri-State residents with emergency room bills for emergency room visits that aren’t actual medical emergencies.

As Deaconess envisions it, the 19,000-square-foot Deaconess ER & Urgent Care adjacent to the hospital system’s Lynch Road clinic will eliminate the need for patients to self-diagnose before seeking medical attention.

“At 10 p.m. at night, when your kid’s sick, it’s confusing and scary,” Deaconess Central Region President Dr. Brad Scheu. ““Do I go to that urgent care? Do I go to this emergency room? Do I wait to call the next day?’ This (facility) is going to take care of all of that.”

Deaconess said Wednesday that patients at the dual emergency and urgent care facility will be evaluated by board-certified emergency physicians who will make the call: Does this require urgent care or ER-level care?

The formula will lower out-of-pocket costs for patients, Scheu said, given that emergency care is nearly always more expensive than urgent care.

“If the care required here was an urgent care level of care, it would be an urgent care-level bill,” he said. “If it’s emergent care, it will be an emergency room-level bill — whereas an emergency room at the hospital, you’re just getting emergency-level billing, no matter what.

“You could show up with a cough and get an emergency-level bill because you showed up in an emergency room. Here, we’ll tailor the billing to the level of care that was provided.”

Early estimates are that the combined ER and urgent care facility clinic will be up and running in about 20 months. It is projected to cost Deaconess \$40 million, although that includes everything else involved with what ultimately will be a three-story facility with medical offices, on-site imaging and an outpatient lab. The building will occupy



A rendering of the new Deaconess ER & Urgent Care. PROVIDED BY DEACONESS

about 60,000 square feet.
Scheu answered other questions that may be on potential patients’ minds.
No appointments will be needed. Just check in online and walk in.
“We’ll take all of the same insurances and the same arrangements that we have at every other facility,” Scheu said.

It’s an emerging trend, but it comes with questions

Combined emergency room and urgent care facilities are not a new idea, although they are an emerging trend in health care.
Baptist Health has such facilities in Louisville, Kentucky, and Jeffersonville, Indiana, to name a nearby example.
“Baptist Health ER & Urgent Care is the only walk-in healthcare clinic in Kentuckiana with urgent care and emergency room services under one roof,” the health system states.
Ascension St. Vincent has no such facility at this time, but they are found in

other states, notably Florida.
There are concerns.
KFF Health News reported in August that at UF Health’s three hybrid facilities in Jacksonville, Florida, urgent care services are offered for an “all-inclusive” \$250 fee for patients if they pay cash.
“While no research has been conducted on this new hybrid model, consumer advocates worry that hospitals are more likely to route patients to costlier ER-level care whenever possible,” KFF Health News reported. “For instance, some services that trigger higher-priced, ER-level care at UF Health’s facilities — such as bloodwork and ultrasounds — can be obtained at some urgent care centers.”
The dual ER/urgent care facilities “can increase hospital profits because they help attract patients, leading to more revenue through diagnostic testing and referrals for specialists or inpatient care,” KFF Health News reported.
Deaconess says its facilities will include “on-site CT, X-ray, ultrasound and labs.”

But the business and economic development leaders, hard hat-wearing dignitaries with shovels and assorted Deaconess employees and supporters who showed up at Wednesday’s groundbreaking weren’t asking challenging questions.
A new \$40 million medical facility means good things for the community, they said.
Former Mayor Lloyd Winnecke, who is president and CEO of the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership (E-REP), said Deaconess’ dual emergency and urgent care facility is “a significant investment in our local economy.”
“Projects like this bring jobs, support local businesses and contribute to the continued growth of our community,” Winnecke told the assemblage. “As Evansville and the surrounding region continue to expand, having innovative health care like this makes our area even more attractive to families, businesses and future investments.”

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