



Joanne Thorp points out the new equipment in the emergency treatment area.

Emergency room remodeled at medical center

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

Visiting a hospital emergency room is just about the last thing anybody wants to do.

But recent remodeling and new equipment in Anchorage's Alaska Native Medical Center emergency department should make that visit more pleasant and improve the level of care as well.

The hospital held an open house earlier this month to present the emergency department's new look and new equipment to the public and to thank those who worked hard to make

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it all happen.

"I've been here a long time, and I never dreamed we would get to this stage where we've made the department really bright, cheery and pleasant and a good place to work," said Dr. Richard Brodsky, director of the emergency room.

Brodsky said the remodeling was especially difficult because they had to provide 24-hour-a-day emergency services and maintain the walk-in clinic throughout the noise and disruption of the four-week construction project.

"During this time, the people who worked the hardest and did the most, took care of the patients, moved all the furniture and things, and kept us together like they always do were the nurses who work in this department," Brodsky said.

Joanne Thorp, nurse manager of the emergency room, kept her department running throughout the project. A Lummi Haida Indian, Thorp has worked in the emergency room for eight years and been its manager for the last two.

"It started out with just a few small things," Thorp said. "Then it kind of blossomed into a long list of things we needed, so we decided we might as well do them all at the same time."

The most noticeable changes are in the reception area where new carpeting, paint and pictures on the wall make waiting for treatment more pleasant. Less apparent are the changes and new equipment which improve patient care.

"You have to realize that this area used to be the warehouse," Thorp said while leading visitors through the remodeled treatment area.

"The doors were not made wide enough for a gurney to go through, so patients had to hobble or be carried through the door. That's just one of the problems we corrected."

New glass walls in the initial screening room allow nurses to see the patients in the waiting area and to tell if somebody needs immediate care.

"In the past, we couldn't see if there were seriously ill or injured people sitting out there just patiently waiting their turn," Thorp said.

"Some patients are very stoic, particularly the elderly ones, and they won't admit to us just how bad they really are feeling."

New computers and printers at work stations speed up record keeping and make patients' lab, pharmacy and health histories quickly available.

The emergency room staff is particularly excited by the modern, state-of-the-art patient monitors which were installed.

"We are so fortunate," Thorp said.

'Sometimes people think because it's free care it must be second-class care. But that's not true here.'

—Joanne Thorp



photos by Barbara Crane



"There isn't an emergency or intensive care staff anywhere in the country who wouldn't give their eye teeth to have these monitors."

Anchorage Mayor Tom Fink attended the open house and proclaimed Oct. 3 Emergency Nurses Day to honor the nurses for the high level of care they provide.

Over half of the Alaska Native Medical Center's emergency room nurses are board certified in emergency nursing. Thorp said that percentage is an unusually high figure for any hospital.

"We handle many, many emergencies here, and it's important for patients to know how well trained we are so they realize they're getting first-class treatment," Thorp said.

"Sometimes people think because it's free care it must be second-class care. But that's not true here."



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Nurses Joanne Thorp, left, and Kim Roe, stand in the remodeled facility, top photo. Other photos, next row, include Roe, who has been an emergency room nurse for five years, and Dr. Tom Nighswander. Photo next row, Steve Elshansky of Anchorage waits for treatment in the medical center's newly remodeled waiting room. At left, Anchorage Mayor Tom Fink and Willie Hensley, lieutenant governor candidate, were on hand for the dedication ceremonies.