

Hospital opens day surgery program

by Pauline Phillips
for the Tundra Times

A new phase of patient care was recently initiated at the Alaska Native Medical Center — the Day Surgery Program.

Day surgery is specifically designed for surgical procedures that are performed in the operating room, which require only a short stay in the hospital. After patients are released from day surgery, they may return home if they live locally. If they are from outlying areas, they are sent to quarters for an overnight stay, enabling them usually to return home the next day.

Attractive rooms with twin beds were constructed on the first floor of the Alaska Area Headquarters Building, across the street from the Medical Center.

Originally built in 1953, the same year the Alaska Native Medical Center opened its doors, this office building had been built as quarters for employees of the Medical Center, but was converted to offices when responsibility for Alaska Native health care was transferred from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the U.S. Public Health Service in 1955. A small section on the second floor was retained for quarters to house some outpatients and patient escorts from the Bush.

All Indian Health Service, Alaska Native areas and community health aides were informed of the new program and shared in its implementation.

Not all operations can be done in day surgery. Only the physician can determine which procedures and which patients will be candidates for the Day Surgery Program.

Criteria for selecting patients are designed to ensure that the patient can tolerate the procedure and can recover adequately within the brief time frame of outpatient surgery.

While outpatient surgery has been available at the Medical Center, it has been limited to those Alaska Native patients residing in the Anchorage area or staying with friends in the city. The new, expanded program makes day surgery available for Alaska Natives throughout Alaska.

When Alaska Native patients arrive

in Anchorage for day surgery, they come directly to the Medical Center. If they arrive at night, they report to the switchboard, are checked into their rooms and receive their meal tickets. In the morning, they are scheduled to see Brenda G. Davis, patient care coordinator, day surgery.

Davis briefs the patients on the Day Surgery Program and arranges for their lab tests, x-ray tests and EKGs. These departments have already been alerted to expedite day surgery patients. After the tests, Davis escorts them to the Day Surgery Unit.

The Day Surgery Unit is on the fifth floor of the Medical Center, which also contains the operating room suite and recovery room. The patients are taken to the day surgery preoperative area where they are interviewed by nurses.

Procedures are explained, questions are answered and videotapes are shown to them. Appointments are made with the physician and the Anesthesia Department.

Some examples of the type of day surgery performed are certain ear operations, cataract surgery, hernias in children, dental rehabilitation and certain orthopedic procedures.

Nurse Manager Emilia G. Speer is in charge of the Day Surgery Unit and oversees a staff of two nurses. The unit is open from 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. If there are any problems in the day surgery quarters after 7 p.m., the patients call the Emergency Room.

There is a large, cheerful lounge in the unit for patients and their families furnished by the Medical Center's Auxiliary, and a post-recovery room where the patients are taken after they wake up from anesthesia until they are ready to leave the hospital.

The chairs are specially designed cardiac chairs that can be raised or lowered to different positions for the patient's comfort. Families are encouraged to remain with the patient in the post-recovery room. Procedures are scheduled, if at all possible, so that patients leave the hospital by 6:30 p.m.

There are certain safeguards in the Day Surgery Program. If a patient doesn't feel well enough to stay in the Day Surgery Quarters, they will re-



Attending the ribbon-cutting ceremonies to open the Day Surgery Program were, from left, Dr. Richard Mandsager, Gerri Laverdure, Herman Lestenkov, Dr. Osamu Matsutani and Brenda Davis.

main under observation at the Medical Center.

The Day Surgery Quarters were furnished by the Medical Center's Auxiliary. Each room contains a reading lamp, AM-FM clock radio with tape deck and drapes. The walls are decorated with framed drawings created by Alaska Native children. Two portacribs, purchased by the auxiliary, are also available for infants having day surgery.

Another added feature and convenience is a lounge equipped with sofas and rocker, color television, refrigerator and microwave, also furnished by the auxiliary. A bulletin board with instructions for patients and families is in the lounge.

Although the quarters are not handicapped-accessible, there are some rooms that have been designed to make it easier for patients with crutches. The quarters are open 24 hours a day and are security guarded.

In the same area is a branch of the TravelCenter where travel arrangements can be made once the doctor has released a patient.

Some benefits of the new day surgery concept, besides saving money, include the ability to schedule the patients in advance, getting prompt attention and returning the patient to home, family, school or job more rapidly. Out-of-town patients who do not wish to stay in the quarters can stay with friends in Anchorage.