

REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION



PHOTOS BY MARTIN GRIFF/THE TIMES

Dr. Randi Axelrod, medical director of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Capital Health's Regional Medical Center in Trenton, stands in the hospital's new perinatal center, the area's only level III NICU for high-risk newborns and deliveries.

Lost in the fanfare of Capital Health's new Hopewell hospital, Regional Medical Center emerges as sophisticated urban hospital

By Erin Duffy
STAFF WRITER

TRENTON — The hospital on Brunswick Avenue has been a city staple since 1887 — even if its name has changed a few times.

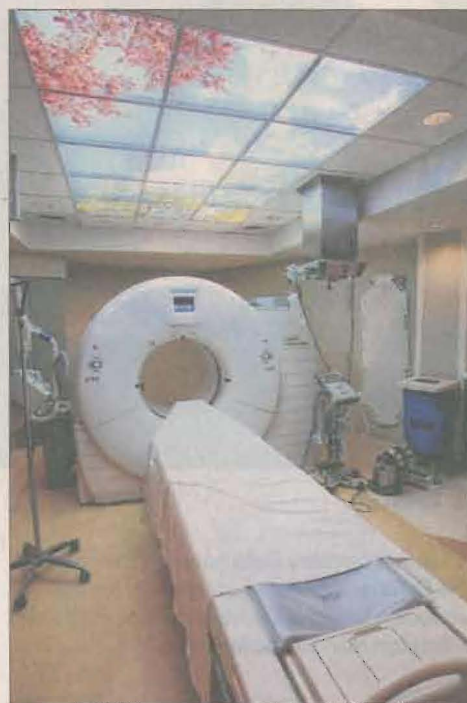
But Capital Health's Regional Medical Center, formerly known as the Fuld campus and before that as Helene Fuld Medical Center, has lately tended to get lost in the fanfare surrounding the upcoming opening of Capital Health's splashy new Hopewell hospital.

"This is almost getting forgotten, and it shouldn't be," said Al

Maghazehe, Capital Health's president and CEO, as he stood in Regional Medical's crowded lobby one morning last week.

Even as a steel skeleton on Scotch Road gave rise to the state-of-the-art Hopewell facility, scheduled for a Nov. 6 opening, Capital Health had been slowly transforming Regional Medical Center into what officials say is a highly sophisticated urban hospital capable of treating the state's sickest and highest-risk patients.

Since 2005, the nonprofit health-care organization has
SEE REGIONAL, PAGE A09



A state-of-the-art Siemens Somatom Definition Flash 256 CAT scan at the center can capture images of the inside of a body in seconds.

"Regional, I will say, is 80 percent new. (With the exception of one older building), the rest of the hospital is brand new, and I'm not talking about painting, I'm talking about basically taking everything down to concrete and rebuilding."

Al Maghazehe, president and CEO of Capital Health

Regional

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A01

invested an estimated \$100 million in the Trenton hospital, expanding its emergency room and trauma center several times, building a new intensive care unit and the Stroke and Cerebrovascular Center of New Jersey.

"Regional, I will say, is 80 percent new," Maghazehe said. With the exception of one older building, "the rest of the hospital is brand new, and I'm not talking about painting, I'm talking about basically taking everything down to concrete and rebuilding."

The renovations are part of Capital Health's two-pronged approach to local health care.

The new Hopewell hospital, with its pediatric emergency department, operating rooms with video consulting technology, and even a spa, has attracted plenty of excitement.

But Hopewell will serve more as a regional community hospital, allowing Capital Health to treat patients beyond the borders of Trenton and create a better payer mix of more affluent, insured patients, executives said.

At Regional, officials envision creating a tertiary-level hospital, capable of delivering some of the most advanced and complex medical care in areas ranging from trauma to neonatal intensive care, rivaling in-state hospitals like Cooper University Hospital and even those in New York and Philadelphia.

"Hopewell has sophistication, but is maybe not as advanced or comprehensive or technologically superior as Regional is," Maghazehe said.

REMAINING IN TRENTON

Maghazehe and other Capital Health executives stress that the investment in Regional Medical Center is another sign of the organization's commitment to the capital city.

When the Hopewell campus opens next month, it will replace Capital Health's aging Mercer hospital on Bellevue Avenue. Mercer will essentially cease operations, though a satellite emergency room and administrative offices will remain.

In 2005, when Capital Health



Dr. Slobodan Grujic, an obstetric anesthesiologist, sets up an operating room at Capital Health's Regional Medical Center's new perinatal center.

first announced its intentions to build a new, state-of-the-art suburban hospital, Trenton's then-mayor Douglas Palmer called it "a slap in the face" to the city and accused Capital Health of abandoning its urban roots.

"One point that we get a little frustrated about is, I don't think people recognize how much we're still doing in Trenton and the investment we have there," spokeswoman Jayne O'Connor said.

On that point, Maghazehe remains a little indignant.

"It's not abandoning Trenton. It's spending \$100 million in Trenton," he said.

On Thursday, Regional Medical Center opened its new labor and delivery wing and regional perinatal center, which was previously housed at Mercer. The center contains the area's only Level III neonatal intensive care unit for high-risk and premature babies.

"It draws from the region," Maghazehe said. "Babies delivering in Princeton, Hamilton, that are high risk, they get transferred here."

Other new additions in the past few years include a 26-bed neurosurgical intensive care unit for patients with strokes, brain tumors and aneurysms, a 36-bed general patient care unit and technology upgrades such as a 256-slice CT scanner that can fully scan a patient's body in as little as 30 seconds.

In recent years Fuld had touted itself as one of the top stroke and cerebrovascular surgical centers in the state, attracting well-respected neurosurgeons away from prestigious hospitals such as

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia.

The hospital also has added to its radiology department a piece of equipment known by the trade name CyberKnife, which can direct a sliver of radiation to a point within the body, lessening damage or disruption to surrounding tissue.

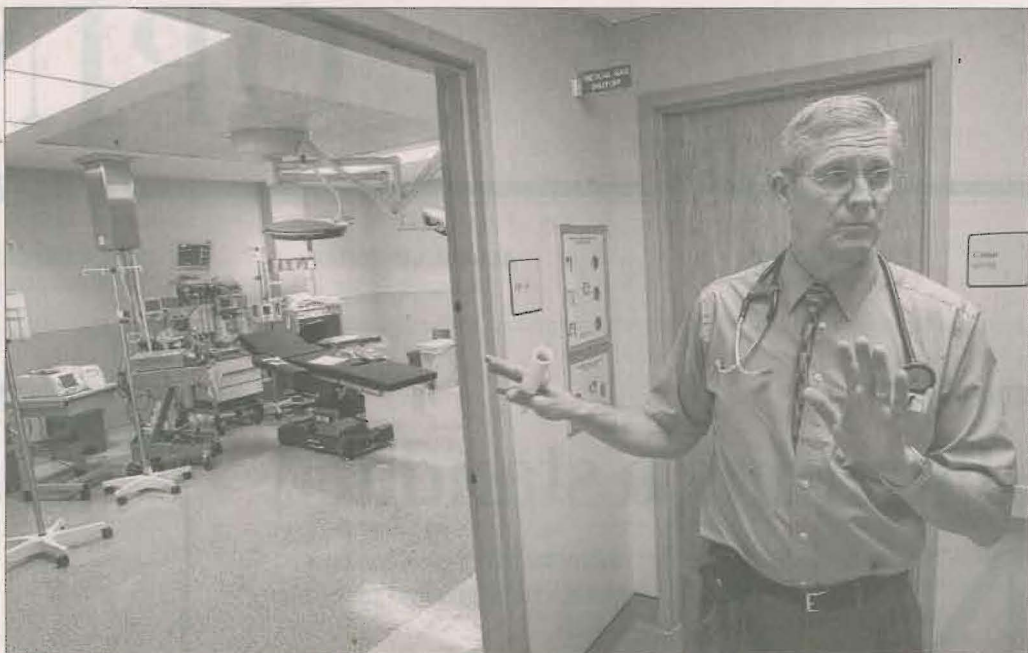
And perish the thought of sterile tiled floors and boring beige paint. The aesthetics of Regional Medical now more closely mimic the soothing color schemes and modern furnishings of the stylish Hopewell campus.

A NEW DIRECTION

As hospitals and health-care systems prepare for the sweeping health-care reforms due to be implemented in 2014, Maghazehe said Regional's transformation follows the shift away from using hospitals as primary care providers.

"The structure of hospitals is evolving pretty rapidly from general hospitals to acute care, a higher level of care," he said. "What's happening in our business is that there is a great deal of progress being made in pharmaceuticals and technology. Half of the patients that used to be admitted are being taken care of on the outpatient side. What you are left with are the kinds of patients that need intensive care."

While Regional Medical has one of the busiest trauma and emergency rooms around — the department takes many of the county's trauma patients, from those wounded by gunfire to victims of car accidents — Capital Health officials have frequently expressed concern



PHOTOS BY MARTIN GRIFF/THE TIMES

Dr. James O'Mara, director of women's services, talks about an operating room at Capital Health's Regional Medical Center's new perinatal center in Trenton. Officials say the center, formerly known as the Fuld campus and before that as Helene Fuld Medical Center, is capable of treating the state's sickest and highest-risk patients.



Dr. Stephen Moffitt, a neonatologist at Regional Medical Center in Trenton, checks on a prematurely born baby, one of the first patients in the region's only level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for high-risk newborns and deliveries.

about people using its ER for minor ailments such as colds and coughs. At Mercer, an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 patients used the ER annually for non-emergency care.

"In Trenton, what's the biggest thing that's missing? Primary care," Maghazehe said. "Trenton has been relying on emergency rooms for primary care and that's not appropriate, because nobody wants to pay for it anymore."

To cut down on unnecessary ER visits, Capital Health has partnered with St. Francis Medical Center, the federally funded Henry J. Austin Health Center and the city of Trenton to form a Trenton Health Team dedicated to beefing up access

to primary care specialists for the city's residents, many of whom are uninsured or underinsured. Another 17 primary and family care doctors were recently transplanted from Lawrence to offices in Trenton across the street from the Mercer campus.

The emphasis on improving outpatient primary care has allowed Capital Health to focus on more complicated procedures, such as CyberKnife radiosurgery or Whipple procedures for patients with pancreatic cancer.

Advanced programs such as the neurosciences institute or digestive care attract respected doctors, nurses and, most importantly, higher insurance

reimbursement rates that allow Capital Health to invest millions in new technology and staff and afford the high levels of charity care it provides, executives said.

"If you're not positioned for this, I don't know what you're going to do five years from now," Maghazehe said. "You could have floors that are full of patients with chronic illnesses, but I don't know how you're going to get paid. Hospitals are eventually going to be used for critical care for the most part, and what we're doing in Trenton is building a critical care hospital."

Contact Erin Duffy at eduffy@njtimes.com or (609) 989-5723.