



NEW SAGE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL TRANSFORMS NAVAJO HEALTH CARE - CRONKITE NEWS

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Sage Memorial Hospital's new campus, right, will replace the decades-old red-roofed buildings on the left, above. A new residential development for future staff can be seen in front of the red-roofed buildings. (Photo by Kevinjonah Paguio/Cronkite News)

A new \$177 million state-of-the-art medical facility in the Navajo Nation is nearing completion.

Before the new hospital opens, staff must keep caring for patients in cramped spaces and with outdated equipment. All of that will change this fall when the new facility opens.

Here's a look at how radically different the new hospital will be.

This building, from the 1960s, still serves as the inpatient facility with an emergency and trauma wing and a wing for imaging and other services. "The piping is very old. The generators are very old and the heating system is very old," said Melinda White, CEO of Sage Memorial Hospital. White worries that this aging medical infrastructure could cause "patient safety issues."

A Sage Memorial employee uses the elevator in the old building to reach the second floor, where inpatient services are located.

Sage Memorial's in-house laboratory, essential for treating patients in a hospital, has some modern equipment, but not much room.

The old facilities have hurt the reputation of the hospital. The Joint Commission, a not-for-profit accrediting agency that certifies health care organizations, has said that Sage Memorial's old medical facility "just isn't a safe place to provide services," White said.

A Sage Memorial employee works at a desk in the emergency and trauma wing on the first floor. The hospital feels small; hallways are tight and pipes run across low ceilings. There is little space for staff to have dedicated workstations.

The lobby in the new Sage Memorial Hospital showcases how spacious the new facility is. The whole complex will be more than twice the size of the old one. Jarom Prows, facility director at Sage Memorial Hospital, said in early April that construction was 95% to 98% complete. Prows acknowledges that construction has been difficult, but he is proud of what he is doing for the community. "That's been the most rewarding part of my job, is hearing people talk about how happy they are about the new hospital," he said.

The old hospital's age limits what the facility can do. "We're not able to see as many patients as we would like," White said. The trauma room is packed in and patients have to share the space. The only semblance of privacy are curtains.

One of the two operating rooms in the new hospital. Prows said the facility will have an expanded intensive care unit, a planned orthopedic space, a dedicated labor, delivery and nursery space and updated equipment – including X-ray, CT and mammography machines – throughout.



Jarom Prows signs his name, alongside the names of other workers and staff, on an MRI machine the day before its plate coverings were put in place. Prows says that punch walks are taking place to point out imperfections so that fixes can be made before construction is complete.

Access to quality health care is coming soon for the community of Ganado and the Navajo Nation. Sage Memorial executives and staff have faced many challenges and are determined to get this project done.

"It's been a long time coming," Prows said.

All photos are by the author.