

Mercy Opens World's First Virtual Care Center

Described as a "hospital without beds," center uses technology to care for patients

CHESTERFIELD, Mo. (Oct. 6, 2015) – As the doors open today at Mercy's Virtual Care Center, it becomes the world's first facility dedicated entirely to care outside its own walls.

A four-story, 125,000-square-foot building, the Virtual Care Center houses 330 Mercy co-workers - but no patients. "It's like a hospital without beds," said Dr. Randy Moore, president of Mercy Virtual. "We have the medical team here, but with technology like highly-sensitive cameras and real-time vital signs, our providers can 'see' patients where they are. That may be in one of Mercy's traditional hospitals, a physician office or in some cases, the patient's home."

The \$54 million building is the nerve center for Mercy's existing telemedicine programs, including:

- **Mercy SafeWatch** – Launched in 2006, it's the largest single-hub electronic intensive care unit (ICU) in the nation. Doctors and nurses monitor patients' vital signs and provide a second set of eyes to bedside caregivers in 30 ICUs across five states. SafeWatch ICUs have seen a 15 percent reduction in how long patients stay in the hospital.
- **Telestroke** – Many community emergency rooms (ERs) across the country don't have a neurologist on-site. With Mercy's telestroke program, patients who come to the ER with symptoms of a stroke can be seen immediately by a neurologist via telemedicine.
- **Virtual Hospitalists** – A team of doctors is dedicated to seeing patients within the hospital around-the-clock using virtual care technology. They can order needed tests or read results, resulting in quicker care.
- **Home Monitoring** – Mercy provides continuous monitoring for hundreds of chronically ill patients in their homes after hospitalization.

Mercy's Virtual Care Center is also designed to be a workspace for innovations in patient care and product testing. With meeting spaces that boast multiple floor-to-ceiling whiteboards on tracks and giant computer monitors, the building invites collaboration and new ideas for getting care to patients when and where they need it, with less expense.

In one newly-launched pilot program, an internal medicine doctor checks in daily with a small set of high-risk patients. "We're testing the concept that a virtual visit every day in the homes of those patients will keep them healthier and out of the hospital," Dr. Moore said. "Rather than having a lot of different doctors for each of those patients' conditions, they have one doctor who's monitoring everything. The people and technology in place here make that possible. It's easy to see if new ideas work. Basically, you dream it or build it and we can test it quickly."

The [building's design](#) reflects Mercy's values regarding life and care of the environment, with painstaking preservation efforts of the naturally wooded site. The exterior is wrapped in glass to allow views of the nearby pond and trees and features terraces and balconies so co-workers can take breaks outside, any time day or night.

Mercy's bold step into a new way of caring for patients is also reminiscent of its founder, Catherine McAuley. "Catherine and the Sisters of Mercy were called the 'walking sisters,' because they went



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out looking for those who needed their help,” said Lynn Britton, president and CEO of Mercy. “We’re doing the same with this center, but we’re using technology to get our caregivers to the bedside instantly. With a decade of telemedicine experience, our Mercy team is once again pioneering a new model of care to improve the lives of our patients.”

Mercy is the seventh largest Catholic health care system in the U.S. and serves millions annually. Mercy includes 46 acute care and specialty (heart, children’s, orthopedic and rehab) hospitals, more than 700 physician practices and outpatient facilities, 40,000 co-workers and more than 2,000 Mercy Clinic physicians in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. Mercy also has outreach ministries in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

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