

How Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center Redefined Its Urgent Care

Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center leaders continuously develop strategies that increase access to high-quality care for some of the city's most vulnerable residents, and doing so landed it the Citation of Merit.

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Turbulence in the Baton Rouge health care landscape accelerated the urgency for Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center leaders to continuously develop and implement performance improvement strategies that increase access to high-quality care for some of the city's most vulnerable residents.

With the 2012 closure of Earl K. Long Medical Center, a state-run safety-net hospital and home to several clinical sites for Louisiana State University School of Medicine, Our Lady of the Lake took on local graduate medical education training. In addition, the closure of Long's ED, used by many for primary care, coupled with an unexpected transfer of the related local LSU outpatient clinics to Our Lady of the Lake had the potential to cause confusion and disruption in patient care.

Hospital leaders reached out to the community, primarily through churches and town hall-style gatherings, to let people know that even though Long was closing, they could still go to the clinics to get their ambulatory care, says Coletta Barrett, vice president of mission. Process changes and enhanced staffing models at the clinics decreased new wait times for patient appointments from an average of eight months to less than 30 days.

The loss of Long's emergency department also meant other local facilities, including Our Lady of the Lake's ED and trauma center, had to absorb this volume. The hospital added 25 beds — a mixture of regular emergency beds, fast-track beds for patients with non-emergent conditions, trauma bays and treatment beds for people with minor-to-moderate illness, says Christi Pierce, vice president safety and quality. Our Lady of the Lake also built a separate pediatric ED.

Because so many ED visits were for non-emergency conditions, Our Lady of the Lake immediately opened an urgent care clinic in north Baton Rouge to coincide with the Earl K. Long closure and then opened a second urgent care center in its Mid-City clinic when Baton Rouge General Medical Center's Mid-City facility closed its ED in March 2015, further stressing local hospital resources.

The state's shuttering of Long also meant the demise of its mental health crisis stabilization unit — a problem that was exacerbated with the closure of Baton Rouge General's Mid-City ED.

Our Lady of the Lake responded by developing a dedicated mental health emergency department with an examination area, eight patient interview rooms, two communal patient waiting areas with reclining chairs, and two secure holding areas.

“It’s amazing when you look at what we’ve accomplished, especially in this amount of time,” Pierce says. “What could have been chaos has instead been the opportunity for a single, equitable community standard of care that everyone can be proud to support.”