

New unit requires space, more staff

The new hybrid observation unit in the ED at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, NC, had two immediate needs when the decision was made to create it in 2005: space and staff.

"We were given space by the hospital that was unoccupied at that time," recalls **Bret Nicks**, MD, assistant medical director, who oversees the unit. "Since then we have shifted small amounts of additional ED space to the unit." He says the unit has 18 beds. It does not require any additional, specialized equipment, he adds. "The key for a hybrid model is to have uniform, monitored beds," Nicks says.

As for staffing, he says, ED staff members take care of patients in this unit as well. "We did have to hire midlevels [nurse practitioners and physician's assistants]. We currently have six FTEs," he says.

Over time, staffing requirements increased, and the ED has hired 12 additional nurses in the past four years, says **James B. Bryant**, MSN, CEN, CAN-BC, director of emergency and transport services. "At first the unit was open Monday through Wednesday from 11 a.m. until 11 p.m.," he says. "Then we went to five days a week, then seven, and finally 24/7 as we figured out how to use it."

The new unit "allows us to meet our budget targets: cost per staff, cost per nurse, hours per patient visit," Bryant says. Actually, he adds, over the last four years, hours per patient visit declined from 4.2 to about 3.8. "That's a positive return and equals more dollars for the department," he says. ■