A Conversation With Dr. John Warner About the New William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital

Dr. John Warner, CEO for UT Southwestern University Hospitals, had a wide-ranging conversation with Center Times about the unique strengths of the new William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital. This Q&A is the second in an ongoing series of progress updates on the hospital, which is now more than 80 percent completed. When the hospital opens its doors in late 2014, it will play a pivotal role in keeping UT Southwestern at the forefront of academic medical centers.

In an era of rapid and sometimes unpredictable change in the health care industry, why did UT Southwestern decide to build a new hospital?

A number of factors influenced the decision. A very important one is the rapid growth in Dallas and the North Texas region, and the expansion in the need for quality health care services that follows that growth. And as the Affordable Care Act extends health care coverage to more people, we expect a continued increase in the demand for clinical services.

Another factor is that while St. Paul University Hospital has served the community well for 50 years, we realized it just wouldn’t be feasible – economically or logistically – to renovate the hospital to the degree that would have been necessary. To take UT Southwestern to the next level, we knew we needed a state-of-the-art hospital that will, under one roof, bring together our three part mission – exemplary patient care, world-renowned scientific research, and the provision of a first-rate education for the next generation of health care professionals. This combination of strengths sets us apart from other hospitals in the region, and it offers unique benefits for patients.

When the William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital opens, it will mark a new era in clinical care for UT Southwestern.

How does the design of the hospital lead to better care and experience for the patient?

From the very beginning, every decision we’ve made in the hospital’s design has been about improving the care and experience of patients and their families. Before we put pen to paper, we asked patients what was important to them, and we followed that up with visits to high-performing hospitals known for providing excellent care and service. We used all that patient and provider feedback, as well as site visits to observe best practices, to inform our design decisions.

I think, perhaps, the patient rooms best exemplify our design priorities. Every room is private, and each is filled with natural light, which has been shown to improve healing and patients’ sense of well-being. Early on, patients told us one thing that frustrated them was giving up control while in the hospital. So we have worked to provide patients with as much control of their experience as possible. Patients will be able to control the room lighting and temperature, window shades, and odor food – all without leaving the bed. We also learned that more time with nurses was essential, both for improving care and for providing time for education of patients and their families. To facilitate this, we have placed nursing workstations and supply closets (“nurse servers”) immediately outside patient rooms. This will allow nurses to spend more time with patients and less time walking back and forth, gathering supplies, or working from the traditional nursing stations seen in most hospitals.

As we approached the technology needs of our patients and staff, we applied the everyday dynamism of various communication and technology devices, making their use easier, more intuitive, and more likely to support better patient care. For example:

- Calls from patient rooms will go direct to the nurse or appropriate person, rather than having to be routed through a clerk.
- Devices monitoring blood pressure, heart rhythm, and other vitals will be automatically linked to the electronic health record, so our staff will be able to spend less time charting and more time with patients and their families.
- Educational content about diseases or procedures will be available on the large television monitors in the room, allowing patients and their families to learn together at a time that’s comfortable and works for them. These monitors are much more than televisions – they will be an integral part of the care experience. All are connected to the electronic medical record and imaging systems, so providers will be able to show and discuss test results with patients and their families.

Another feature we’re really proud of is the videoconferencing capability, which will be available in patients’ rooms and in most care environments. These same high-definition television monitors are also equipped with high-definition cameras, enabling our patients and providers to stay connected with family, friends, and caregivers in other locations. We also know this will improve our ability to involve primary care physicians and providers in a patient’s hometown in their care, improving the continuum of care patients will experience after their discharge from UT Southwestern.

I’m very proud that we’ve prioritized investments that promote quality, safety, and cost efficiency, and we’ve invested in features that provide the flexibility to quickly integrate new technology in the years ahead. It’s a great place to do all of this work, but most importantly, it will be a great place for patients.

Will the new hospital make a difference in recruiting students and health care professionals here?

UT Southwestern is well-known for its science, and we have a terrific medical school and training programs. What we have not had is a large, state-of-the-art hospital. Now, with the opening of the William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital – as well as the opening of the new Parkland Memorial Hospital, which UT Southwestern supports with medical staff – there will be two top-tier academic medical centers offering comprehensive care but distinct clinical services for patients, as well as two opportunities for faculty, staff, trainers, and students to learn in the unique settings.

As we have leveraged architecture and technology to improve care, we also have built in innovative new approaches to teaching and research. Each floor environment will have at least six conference rooms designed for the optimal team-based, collaborative care that we know will define the best hospitals in this era of increased focus on quality and safety. These spaces have the same videoconferencing and virtual collaboration tools seen in the best universities, and will give our teams the ability to interface with experts across the campus, across the state, or anywhere in the world. We also have a best-in-class conference center that will enhance education opportunities for those on our campus and provide an opportunity for the medical and lay communities in North Texas.

As we increase our focus on clinical trials and begin to translate the important science discovered at UT Southwestern to direct patient care, we felt it was important to provide support for those activities in the new hospital. With that in mind, we have built several patient rooms for research coordinators, allowing them to be close to patients and allowing our patients access to the important advancements that only take place in academic medical centers.

Finally, to recruit the best leaders, providers, trainers, and students, you need the best facilities. Adding this fantastic facility to our renowned science and educational programs will allow us to recruit – and retain – the very best talent.

An opportunity to support the Clements University Hospital

UT Southwestern has created opportunities for both staff members and external audiences to be part of the design of the Future of Medicine campaign, which supports the new William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital.

For more information on how to give, employees should go to the UTSW intranet site at utsouthwestern.net/giving/campaign. External audiences can find information at utsouthwestern.edu/hospitals/campaign.

Office of Development staff also are available to answer questions at 214-648-2344 or giving@utsouthwestern.edu.

The new hospital will be impressive, with a number of amenities for patients. Will this drive up the cost of care?

Building a hospital is like building a new house – only on a much larger, more complex scale.

When you start with a clean sheet of paper, you have the opportunity to incorporate a wide range of cost efficiencies and innovations. So, it’s possible to build a facility that will operate very cost-efficiently, while still providing a comfortable environment with features people want to come. In fact, with the intense pressure to keep health care costs under control, this is absolutely necessary – and it’s what we’re doing.

Some of the innovations really didn’t cost additional money. For example, the design allows patients to move more easily and cost is reduced for things like supply elevators. This reduces the noise and boosts and creates a cleaner environment. In a project of this size, that decision didn’t add any appreciable costs. It was just good planning.

Just like big companies, hospitals have lots of supplies. And we looked to industry leaders to help us pick the equipment to optimize our supply chain and inventory management, reducing waste and lowering costs.

We also know that reducing complications and infections not only improves care, it lowers costs and shortens recovery. Our hospitals have sophisticated air filtering systems to filter out bacteria. While most hospitals do this only in areas where patients have compromised immune systems – like areas for chemotherapy and transplant – we essentially provided that level of air filtration for the whole hospital. If designed up front, it costs only a fraction of what it costs to add later.

We also have dedicated chutes for trash and soiled linen, allowing us to transport it to the loading dock for pick-up, rather than storing it on the units for collection.

The aesthetic elements – like artwork, landscape, and gardens – are designed to create a peaceful environment that reduces stress for patients and their families. Studies demonstrate that a restful, natural environment can help speed healing from surgery, infections, and other conditions... and should help patients stay more comfortable.

So there’s scientific support for our decision. But the main takeaway is that this is all about making the patient’s care and overall experience the best it can possibly be – and that’s what being a world-class hospital is all about.