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New hospital gives county more capacity for mental health treatment

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Most rooms in Fairfax Hospital's new 30-bed adult psychiatric unit inside Providence Regional Medical Center Everett's Pacific Campus are double occupancy and feature sweeping panoramic views from the seventh floor windows.



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Dale Landis (right), a nurse manager at Fairfax Hospital, leads a tour Wednesday of the new 30-bed adult psychiatric unit inside Providence Regional Medical Center Everett's Pacific Campus that will open Monday. The facility will more than double the number of hospital beds for treating patients with mental health problems in Snohomish County.



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The new 30-bed adult psychiatric unit inside Providence Regional Medical Center Everett's Pacific Campus features an isolation room in addition to the regular occupancy rooms for in-patient mental health care.



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Visitors toured the new Fairfax Hospital 30-bed adult psychiatric unit inside Providence Regional Medical Center Everett's Pacific Campus on Wednesday. The new facility, which opens Monday, will more than double the number of hospital beds for treating patients with mental health

problems in Snohomish County.

By [Sharon Salyer](#), Herald Writer

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EVERETT — For years, people often were forced to seek in-patient mental health treatment outside Snohomish County, but that is beginning to change.

When [Fairfax Hospital](#) opens a \$4 million, 30-bed adult psychiatric unit Monday, the number of hospital beds in the county for treating in-patient mental health problems will more than double.

“There's such a lack of psychiatric beds in Snohomish County,” said Jennifer Roach, who works in the recovery center for [Catholic Community Services](#). Earlier this month, she tried to help a patient who needed in-patient services. The only place with an opening was in south King County. “To be able to say there's a place in Everett, I'm very excited about it,” she said.

The new unit is on the seventh floor of [Providence Regional Medical Center Everett's](#) Pacific Campus. Patients will have views of Puget Sound and the Cascade Mountains.

“Some of the best views in Everett,” said Bob Terwilliger, Snohomish County's court administrator, who toured the facility during an open house Wednesday.

Decorated in earth tones and with a faux-bamboo floor, much of the unit looks similar to a typical medical clinic.

Patients will be able to participate in a yoga program led by a women who once worked at Fairfax's Kirkland hospital. They will be able to join a theater group and take on short, dramatic roles.

The main purpose of the unit, though, is to help stabilize patients who often suddenly find themselves in emotional crisis, said Matt Crockett, a Fairfax assistant administrator.

They might be suicidal or considering harming others. They might not be able to care for themselves. They might be dealing with acute depression or experiencing the extreme emotional peaks and valleys of bipolar disorder.

The goal of anyone's stay at an in-patient clinic, which typically lasts 11 to 14 days, is to become emotionally stable. Patients participate in group sessions and talk with a clinical therapist several times a week. They meet with someone every day to review medications.

“With mental health, there hasn't been the support services in the community to help prevent patients from getting to that acute crisis,” Crockett said.

A plan is created for each patient with recommendations for treatment and support following discharge, he said.

The opening of Fairfax's new in-patient unit has been welcomed in a county where, until now, there has only been one hospital psychiatric unit, a [23-bed facility](#) at Swedish/Edmonds hospital.

Karen Schilde, a board member of the [National Alliance on Mental Illness Snohomish County](#), said that Washington ranks among the lowest in the nation for the number of in-patient psychiatric beds per capita. “We're thrilled to see this,” she said.

The Fairfax unit will have a staff of 45 and could treat as many as 500 patients in the first year.

[North Sound Mental Health Administration](#), a regional coordinating group, will use some of the beds at the new Everett unit for patients who are being admitted involuntarily, said Ken Stark, director of Snohomish County Human Services.

That will help alleviate the problem of psychiatric patients being kept in hospital emergency rooms while awaiting a bed in a psychiatric unit. The state Supreme Court recently ruled that practice unconstitutional.

“Thank goodness that Providence and Fairfax were as far along in their plans as they were,” Stark said. “Had they not been able to open it as soon as they are, our five-county region would be in a little trouble.”

Anyone coming to the unit will go through two sets of locking doors. “You can't have both doors unlocked at the same time,” Crockett said. That keeps patients from leaving before they're discharged or people from entering the unit who aren't authorized.

Once inside those doors, the space is open, with patient access to day rooms and a dining room. Patients rooms are aligned along two halls. Most are two-bed rooms. One is designed for just one person. One isolation room, for patients with the most severe problems, has a bed but no windows.

The opening of the new unit “is an encouraging sign that we're moving in the right direction” with mental health services, said Keith Binkley, president of NAMI Snohomish County.

“This is just the kind of facility we need to provide appropriate, good quality care for individuals in their time of need,” he said. “It's long overdue and very welcomed.”

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