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Post Falls rehab hospital expects surge

Medicare certification projected to boost acute-care facility's volumes, double work force to 200

By [Emily Brandler](#)

Northern Idaho Advanced Care Hospital, an eight-month-old long-term acute-care hospital, says it has received a Medicare certification that it expects will boost both its patient volumes and its work force substantially.

The for-profit hospital, which opened in February at 600 N. Cecil, received its Medicare designation as a long-term acute-care hospital earlier this month, says CEO Rick Richards. The 40-bed facility offers comprehensive, long-term care of patients recovering from strokes, head and spinal-cord injuries, pulmonary conditions, and other functional deficiencies that result from acute injuries or chronic illness, he says. It is the only licensed long-term acute-care hospital in the Inland Northwest, he says.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services requires that patients stay at a hospital for an average of 25 days for the hospital to obtain a long-term acute-care certification, Richards says. The Post Falls hospital has been treating patients for an average of 25 days, but was only receiving Medicare reimbursement for about five of those days, which is the rate allotted for short-term acute-care facilities, he says. As a result, the hospital has been keeping its census to between 15 and 20 patients. It now plans to grow that volume gradually to about 35 patients, he says.

"Now, we're appropriately reimbursed for our patients," Richards says. "This is happy news for us."

The new classification also will help Northern Idaho Advanced Care as it seeks to secure contracts with health insurance companies in the region, says spokesman Chad Hutson. The hospital has primarily targeted its marketing efforts at Spokane and Kootenai counties, but has been attracting patients from cities such as Yakima, Wash.; Boise, Idaho; and Billings, Mont., which further illustrates the need to secure contracts with regional insurers, Hutson says.

As patient volumes climb, the hospital plans to hire more employees, Richards says. It currently has about 90 employees, and expects to employ roughly 200 workers by early next year, he says.

"As we're able to open the doors a little wider to patients, we'll continue to ramp up hiring," Richards says.

The hospital employs physicians, nurses, physical and occupational therapists, a dietitian, and a social worker, among others, Hutson says. The hospital treats patients who need more intensive services than those offered by skilled-nursing facilities, but who don't require the services, such as surgical and diagnostic procedures, of a short-term acute-care hospital, Hutson says. In the past, short-term acute-care hospitals such as Kootenai Medical Center either have had to treat patients for a longer period of time without receiving reimbursement from Medicare or move the patients to a facility that has a lower level of care even though they might not have been ready to do so, he says.

"We basically fit in the middle of the continuum of care," Hutson says.

After a patient's medical condition has improved sufficiently, the Post Falls hospital refers the patient to KMC's rehabilitation department, Spokane-based St. Luke's Rehabilitation Institute, a skilled-nursing facility, or sends the person home, he says.

Northern Idaho Advanced Care has eight observation rooms, a 6,000-square-foot therapy gym, an aquatic therapy pool, and an outdoor therapy courtyard. It's owned by Albuquerque, N.M.-based Ernest Health Inc., which owns a network of rehabilitation and long-term acute-care hospitals across the U.S.

The hospital's 36,000-square-foot Post Falls facility cost \$15 million to build, and was one of two hospitals to open in Post Falls in the past few years.

The other, Northwest Specialty Hospital, opened in 2003 and does outpatient and non-emergency in-patient surgical procedures, as well as diagnostic imaging.

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