

HEALTH CARE QUARTERLY

Charlotte facility to bring care to military vets

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Childress Klein is co-developer of the Veterans Affairs' health-care center under... [more](#)

The end of two wars in the Middle East, coupled with Charlotte's growing population, has greatly boosted demand for health-care services for veterans.

To meet that demand, the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) is expanding its facilities. The Charlotte Health Care Center will open in the spring in LakePointe Corporate Center.

It will offer enhanced outpatient primary care and specialty services for an estimated 40,000 area veterans who will use the VA's health-care system annually.

The facility, on Tyvola Road near the airport, will be a vast upgrade from the VA's outpatient clinic near UNC Charlotte. At nearly 400,000 square feet, the new facility rivals an Ikea store in size and offers four times the clinic space as the outpatient center.

"This is the first time we've had such an aging population of older vets from the Vietnam and World War II eras simultaneously with so many returning younger veterans with injuries we haven't seen before who wouldn't have survived in previous wars," says [Blake Bourne](#), director of community initiatives for Charlotte Bridge Home, a veteran support agency. "We should be prepared to serve the veterans who are eligible to receive that care."

Nearly 150,000 veterans live in the Charlotte region, and they are putting pressure on the flagship VA hospital in Salisbury. Visits by new patients to the full-service hospital have climbed 70% since 2004, compared with 23% in new-patient growth for the national Veterans Affairs system.

The Charlotte facility was in the planning stages in 2014 when VA centers nationwide came under scrutiny for falsifying records to reduce the appearance of long wait times. VA centers now aim to schedule all appointments within 30 days.

"There were several health-care centers that were funded in legislation after the crisis, but this was not one of them," says Bart Major, interim public affairs officer for the Salisbury hospital, which will oversee operations of the Charlotte facility. "We're much further along in development than those."

Charlotte developer [Childress Klein](#) partnered with Cambridge Healthcare Solutions of Herndon, Va., to build the six-story, 429,000-square-foot building in LakePointe Corporate Center at West Tyvola Road and Cascade Pointe Boulevard.

[Childress Klein-Cambridge](#) will lease the facility to the VA, making it the largest leased facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA owns most of its hospitals but leases its outpatient health-care centers.

The facility is the size of a small hospital, but it has no overnight beds. For management and logistics, the Charlotte HCC will fall under the management of the W. G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center, a 24-hour hospital with an intensive-care unit and emergency

department. The Salisbury hospital is one of four VA medical centers in North Carolina; the others are in Asheville, Durham and Fayetteville.

Local veterans have been receiving care at a clinic that opened in 2008 near UNC Charlotte. In 2014, the facility saw more than 26,000 patients in need of primary care and disease prevention, mental-health services, eye and ear care, PET scans, endoscopy and minor outpatient surgery.

The new Charlotte health-care center will offer far more services than are provided at the existing clinic, Major says.

It will offer expanded services for cardiology, endoscopy, urology, prosthetics. Also new are clinics for gastrointestinal illnesses and dentistry.

Five operating rooms will allow more same-day surgery procedures, and a large pharmacy will fill prescriptions. Other expanded services include physical therapy and occupational therapy. Not all of the new services will be offered immediately but will be added over time, Major says.

The new center includes space for rotating clinics that will be open several days a week to treat patients in dermatology, rheumatology, nephrology, infectious diseases and oncology follow-ups.

“All of those services aren’t going to start right away, but will open as staffing levels and funding allow,” Major says. “Eventually we will have a host of specialty clinics there permanently or on a rotating basis. A veteran won’t have to go to Salisbury for podiatry, for example. Our goal is to get the specialty services to where the veterans are.”

Contractor JE Dunn broke ground on the \$104 million Charlotte facility in March 2014, with a two-year construction window.

Clinic space will total 295,000 square feet. By comparison, the current Charlotte outpatient clinic is 67,400 square feet.

The facility will be home to about 500 health-care workers, some transferring from the outpatient clinic.

This is Childress Klein's first project with the VA and its first joint venture with Cambridge Holdings, which has extensive experience working with the agency. Childress Klein brought land to the deal, having owned the 35 acres in LakePointe since the mid-1980s.

"Health care is a compatible use within the park the way we planned it," says [Tom Coyle](#), partner at Childress Klein.

LakePointe spans two sides of Tyvola Road. About 1 million square feet of office space is built or in the works there, including the headquarters of Sealed Air Corp., which is under construction.

The Charlotte facility is rising on a site that's highly visible from Billy Graham Parkway.

RPA Design in Charlotte, which specializes in health-care and senior-living projects, is the architect of record. The firm designed the facility to earn LEED Silver certification.

[David Ramsey](#), managing principal and chairman at RPA, says the project has been on a fast track to open within two years.

With guidance from VA officials in Washington, RPA worked to integrate a 17-bed dialysis unit in the project that was not part of the original concept.

The final design also features what Ramsey calls the PACT model, short for Patient Aligned Care Team. That means exam rooms — and there are more than 200 in the new building — are designed in clusters of nine that face a staff work area. Waiting areas are in the periphery, where there's natural light.

Exam rooms include two doors — one for veterans to enter to receive care and the other for health-care providers to meet with the patient.

"That way, veterans don't have to come in the staff area," Ramsey says. "Veterans come into areas very quickly and staff comes to them."

Ramsey says it's an improvement from the traditional approach, in which veterans shuffled from a consultation room to exam room to treatment room. Now all services are rendered within the PACT.

"When the HCC opens, it will serve over 40,000 veterans in the immediate region, doubling the service capacity of the current VA clinic," Ramsey says.

As the Charlotte facility is being built, the VA also is opening a similar building in Kernersville that will replace an outpatient clinic in Winston-Salem.

The Charlotte outpatient clinic may remain open. “We have a larger veteran population in Charlotte, so we may see the need for two facilities there,” Major says.

VA officials expect the Charlotte center to alleviate pressure on the Salisbury hospital. It could encourage local veterans to take advantage of VA medical services now that they are more convenient.

“The Salisbury VA clinic is a great hospital and when it was built it made sense for it to serve North Carolina’s urban and rural communities. But like a lot of things, North Carolina is outgrowing it,” says Charlotte Bridge Home’s Bourne. The new facility “will make it more convenient for veterans that are further south in Ballantyne or even in South Carolina to get care.”

Closer Look

Details on the VA’s Charlotte health-care center:

- **Developer:** Childress Klein-Cambridge Healthcare Solutions
- **Location:** Tyvola Road and Cascade Pointe Boulevard in LakePointe Corporate Center
- **Building:** Six stories with 295,000 usable square feet (429,000 square feet total) on 35 acres
- **Lease terms:** 20 years with annual rent of \$11.3 million, or \$38.31 per usable square foot
- **Delivery date:** Spring 2016

Source: Veterans affairs

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