



Survey says Lincoln County values hospital

(May 2007) Good people recognize a good thing when they have it in their midst.

A recent Community Healthcare Survey of 400 households in and around the Lincoln Hospital district showed that people in Lincoln County are very supportive of their local hospital.

"We're very excited about the results," says Administrator Tom Martin. "People recognize the work we've done to improve quality. They see good things happening here — the quality practice of medicine."

In fact, the percentage of those giving the highest rating for urgent care at Lincoln is now 65 percent — up from 50 percent in a similar 1999 phone poll. And 53 percent of those polled said they believe access to healthcare is better than five years ago. 16 percent of those said it was due to better physicians.

As for services, the poll showed that a significantly larger number of locals are accessing out-patient services at Lincoln. Out-patient surgery numbers are up a whopping 44 points from a 1999 survey — from 8 percent utilizing out-patient surgical services to 52 percent.

Ultrasound usage is up 32 points from 36 percent to 68 percent, and mammography utilization is up from 46 percent in 1999 to 65 percent today — a jump of 19 points.

Lab saw a nice increase in usage, up 24 points from 36 percent in 1999 to 60 percent. Physical and Occupational Therapy also increased from 60 percent to 64 percent despite more competition in the area.

"In fact, 76 percent of the people polled said they or a family member had used at least one of our out-patient services. This is good news."

Looking at Acute Care in-patient services, 36 percent said that they or a family member had been hospitalized at Lincoln within the past year. This outpaced any of the Spokane hospitals by 14 percent.

Just over 68 percent of those who chose Lincoln Hospital for in-patient care rated the care as excellent. This number is up from 58 percent in 1999.

The Emergency Room also received high marks from the community with 55 percent of locals coming to Lincoln Hospital or one of the clinics with an urgent need. "The public was very clear that it wants access to the ER and that it views our services highly," says Martin.

There is room for improvement.

"Areas that scored low included patient rooms in Acute Care and there is a public perception that our ER and overall medical equipment is not cutting edge. Still our care rates very highly," says Martin, noting that the aging facility doesn't tell the whole story. "It's like giving your wife a diamond bracelet in a paper bag. The bag masks the treasure within."

Martin says the facility should have more private rooms with bathroom access and there is always a need for space to increase programs. This survey shows the public knows it too.

And, they seem to generally willing to financially support a bond to renovate and expand the hospital if necessary.

"This is very exciting news for our future. Sixty-five percent of hospital district residents polled said they would support a bond measure — especially if it meant upgrading equipment and technology," reports Martin.

So will Lincoln Hospital renovate, upgrade and expand? The Board is currently reviewing strategic plans and is giving serious consideration to this information as part of the process.

Last, but not ever least, kudos to the community! The consulting firm which made the phone calls was impressed that not one of the 400 people they called hung up on their surveyors. "That says something about us," says Martin. "It shows how committed the people here are to having access to top notch healthcare."