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Army Corps improves patient care at West Point hospital

By JoAnne Castagna, Ed.D.

In 1931 when President Herbert Hoover wanted to appoint Dr. William Lordan Keller as the Surgeon General of the Army, Keller declined. This would be one of many prestigious military appointments that Keller would not accept because of his unreserved devotion to his patients.

Throughout Keller's long medical career, that included being a surgeon at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in New York, he would also become well known for his professionalism, boldness, ingenuity and phenomenal medical achievements.

It's because of this that West Point named its hospital after him. Today the Keller Army Community Hospital continues to carry on Keller's commitment to patient care. To help it do this they called upon the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District to construct an addition to the hospital that will provide needed outpatient medical services for its Cadets.

"The new addition will provide the patient beneficiaries with world class healthcare. West Point will have a hospital environment comparable to the very best private sector facilities," said Program Manager Maj. Christopher Kiss, U.S. Army Health Facility Planning Agency. "The Cadets will continue to benefit from a hospital that provides convenient medical care. This new addition will sustain and further improve the reduction in Cadet lost training and class hours due to the proximity of the outpatient care to the classroom."

The addition was required because of the outdated layout of the existing hospital. The hospital was built in the 1970s, using the healthcare model of the time, that emphasized inpatient care. Medical procedures have changed reducing the need for inpatient care.

Army Corps contractor Morgan Construction Enterprises of New York City will construct the hospital's approximate 51,000 square foot addition.

"The new addition will have a dedicated entrance and lobby and provide outpatient services such as ambulatory care and clinics for optometry, ophthalmology, physical therapy and orthopedics," said Team Leader Erika Keutmann, West Point Area Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The project also includes creating additional office space for TRICARE, the military's medical insurance service, parking space, major utility relocation, storm water retention work, as well as minor renovation work where the addition connects to the existing hospital.

Saving money on energy is also part of the project. For example, the team is installing a renewable photovoltaic solar array on the roof. The team's goal is to have the project meet the environmental requirements to achieve silver certification in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

The clinic's design will save taxpayer funds as well as improve patient care. The design includes features to capture more natural daylight and improve the way patients find their way around the facility.

The project is using a flexible design that will allow the hospital to make changes in their services over time based on changing patient needs and physician services, without having to perform further renovation and spending additional taxpayer dollars.

"The facility attains some of its flexibility through the use of a very standardized or modular design," said Kiss. "For example, all of the exam rooms are laid out exactly the same, regardless of orientation in the building. The door is always left-handed and there are sinks located in every exam room as well as in every provider office. In the future, if more exam rooms are needed and less administrative space; the facility will simply change furniture in the spaces, but the sinks will already be there.

"The United States Military Academy trains the future leaders of America, and the first glimpse that these future leaders have of Army medicine is during their time at West Point. This project's importance to modernize and expand its capability is heightened by the responsibility to provide the best example of service to our young leaders."

The expansion of the Keller Army Community Hospital is being performed in phases to allow the hospital to remain open during the construction. The project is expected to be completed in winter 2014 and open to patients in spring 2014.