

Lucio: Micro-Hospitals Fill A Void In Our RGV Health Care System

AUSTIN, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville), was quoted recently at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Valley Baptist Health System's micro-hospital facility in Weslaco. "Not every ER patient needs a level 1 trauma center; what they do need is to be seen quickly and know they will receive necessary care on site," said Lucio.

"Expect more micro-hospitals to pop up across the country."*

WESLACO, RGV-Valley Baptist Health System CEO Manny Vela says he expects more micro-hospitals to pop up across the country.

Speaking at a groundbreaking ceremony for his health system's new micro-hospital in Weslaco, Vela said such facilities are a relatively new care model.

"This is the first of its kind in South Texas. There are very few of them across the country but you will see more and more popping up. We cannot be more excited than to introduce this model to the Rio Grande Valley," Vela said.

"Micro-hospitals are relatively new care models. They provide ambulatory and emergency services, leaving more complex service lines to the larger hospitals in the area. Many health systems throughout are pushing the micro-hospital model now because of the industry's focus on providing care at the right time in the appropriate setting."

The address for Valley Baptist's new Weslaco facility is 1021 West Interstate 2. It is located on the south side of the expressway between Westgate and Texas. Services at the micro-hospital include:

- 14-bed emergency department (two trauma bays)
- One procedure room

- Eight inpatient beds
- Imaging services (including outpatient) featuring X-ray, ultrasound, and 64-slice CT scans
- Laboratory services (including outpatient)

More than 150 local residents, business leaders, and elected officials joined Valley Baptist Health System representatives for a ribbon-cutting event held at the new facility on Wednesday, January 15.

In his remarks, Hidalgo County Commissioner David Fuentes pointed out that Valley Baptist has been providing quality healthcare in South Texas for 95 years. He said that while hospitals improve a community's tax base and add to economic activity their greatest asset is treating patients.

“It is the human investment, the touching of people's lives and how you are there at the most critical time of need. The empathy and quality of care that you show to the patients that you have really is what defines you as a quality care hospital,” Fuentes said of Valley Baptist Health System.

“My experience of Valley Baptist is one of superior care. We truly are blessed to have a micro-hospital like this in Hidalgo County, in Precinct One, in the great city of Weslaco.”

In his remarks, Valley Baptist CEO Vela pointed out that the new facility in Weslaco is this health system's first ever access point in Hidalgo County.

“It truly memorializes our continued work and commitment to providing the highest quality healthcare services throughout the Rio Grande Valley with our main goal of treating all patients as close to their home as possible,” Vela said.

“Our main goal is to treat all patients as close to their house as possible because we truly believe that this creates a positive outcome and creates a quicker healing environment for them.”

Vela said the new micro-hospital covers more than 28,000 square feet, with a whole service emergency department, inpatient unit, laboratory, pharmacy, imaging and respiratory services.

“Specifically we have 12 emergency department beds, two trauma beds, one procedure room, as well as eight inpatient medical beds. We also have brand new, state of the art imaging equipment, including a 64-slice CT scanner, x-ray machine and ultra sound,” Vela said. “In short, it is a full-service shop, folks.”

Vela said he hoped those attending the ribbon-cutting shared his excitement, “knowing that same high quality Valley Baptist Health Care that our community has known and trusted for over 95 years will now be offered to the entire Mid Valley.”

He added: “We could not be more honored, nor could we be more humbled to have the opportunity to serve you and your families and we are here to assure you we will never take our eye off the goal of ensuring that each of you and your loved ones will receive the highest quality of healthcare without ever having to leave the Rio Grande Valley.”

Ronda Lewis, RN, BSN, BHM, and Valley Baptist Micro-Hospital – Weslaco administrator, said micro-hospitals offer much more than free-standing emergency rooms.

“Free-standing emergency rooms can only treat and release. If a patient needs additional testing or treatment that requires hospitalization, they would have to be transferred to a larger facility to receive care,” Lewis told the *Rio Grande Guardian*.

“This is not the case with our micro-hospital. We can simply admit those patients who require additional care to an inpatient bed in our facility, and because we are a small hospital, we can offer that personal attention that patients expect and deserve.”

Jennifer Bartnesky-Smith, Valley Baptist Health System’s chief strategy officer, said the new facility is best described as a community hospital that delivers acute care on a smaller scale than its larger counterparts.

“Micro-hospitals are relatively new care models that truly focus on treating low-acuity patients and providing both ambulatory and emergency services, leaving more complex service lines to the larger hospitals in the area,” Bartnesky-Smith said.

“Many health systems throughout the country are pursuing the micro-hospital model now because of the industry’s focus on providing care at the right time in the appropriate setting.”

While the micro-hospital model is a new concept for the Valley, Bartnesky-Smith said, the goal is to provide the same high-quality healthcare that families have received at Valley Baptist Health System for nearly a century.

“The overarching goal of the micro-hospital is to be able to offer the same Valley Baptist care that the community has grown to trust over generations directly to the Mid-Valley community, so folks can receive this level of care a little closer to home,” Bartnesky-Smith said.

“This project is truly a labor of love for our community. We recognize that no one wants to be in a hospital, but when those times do come, we want to be able to offer the very best to our community as close to home as possible. This project is simply a manifestation of our steadfast commitment to truly serve our entire Valley community.”

In his remarks, Weslaco Mayor David Suarez said Valley Baptist is known throughout the region as one of the best in the health service industry.

“When minutes count at saving lives, having this access right here means patients needing critical care can receive it faster,” Suarez said.

State Rep. Armando “Mando” Martinez said that the new facility will give local residents more options to receive much-needed healthcare.

“Some might say this is about competition, but I disagree,” he said. “This is about providing a service that is needed here in the area. If there wasn’t a need, then I don’t think this micro-hospital would be here today.”

State Sen. Eddie Lucio said micro hospitals fill a void in the healthcare system.

“Not every ER patient needs a level 1 trauma center; what they do need is to be seen quickly and know they will receive necessary care on site. By being a hospital, instead of just an ER, patients can receive their testing, without traveling to a larger or different facility. When looking at the facility’s features, we can see how truly unique it is,” Lucio said.

*Taylor, Steve "Vela: Expect more micro-hospitals to pop up across the country." The Rio Grande Guardian. 26, January 2020
<https://riograndeguardian.com/vela-expect-more-micro-hospitals-to-pop-up-across-the-country/>