

SANDUSKY — The new Sandusky Healthcare Center at Columbus Avenue and Perkins Avenue was built to offer the best possible primary care, Firelands Health officials say.

Doctors who are treating patients in the brand-new building were consulted about the design, said Katherine Smith, R.N., director of quality for the Firelands Physician Group.

The Sandusky Healthcare Center, unveiled in a public event in late October, began patient appointments on Nov. 1.

The 45,000-square-foot, two-story Firelands Sandusky Healthcare Center, at 2520 Columbus Ave., houses about a dozen doctors and also has imaging and laboratory services in the building, making routine tests and imaging easy for patients who need procedures such as a blood test or an X-ray.

The building, which cost close to \$25 million, has huge windows that give the interior a sunny, welcoming feel. The windows have a green tint, consistent with green being a branding color for Firelands Health.

Inside, the offices are organized into pods which keep doctors close to their staff and to patients, and that design is no accident, said Smith, who deals with patient safety, the quality of primary healthcare and the experiences of Firelands Health patients. The ultimate design was “very

intentional,” she said.

The possible designs for the interior included a traditional system of hallways and separate offices behind doors, Smith said.

Instead, Firelands opted for a building interior that fostered a team dynamic, with exam rooms that circle inside a pod.

Doctors were at the forefront of those early design decisions. They opted to be among the nurses’ stations, Smith said.

“They all felt very passionate about being embedded with their clinical team all day,” she said.

Dr. Matthew Widmer, DO, a family medicine and sports medicine physician in the new building, said the traditional arrangement has offices for the doctor tucked away from the treatment area to provide privacy for the physician.

“The problem with that is it takes you away from your staff,” Widmer said.

The pod arrangement makes communication easy, although doctors can still obtain privacy when they need it, he said.

Widmer said he’s also pleased with another design element — big examination rooms large enough to hold an entire family. That’s useful for times when the entire family needs to be a partner for someone’s health care, he said.

Widmer said including laboratory services and imaging services in the building isn’t just a nice convenience for patients, who don’t have to go to the bother of making a separate trip to get blood drawn or to get an X-ray for a sore foot. It’s a decision that also will result in better medical care, he said.

Widmer explained that compliance with a doctor’s orders is an element to good

medical care, and patients are more likely to get a test if they can simply go to another part of the building.

The situation at Sandusky Healthcare Center also speeds getting results back to the doctor, and that can be helpful, too. If an X-ray shows a broken leg, the doctor doesn’t want the patient walking around and putting pressure on it, he said.

The doctors operating at Sandusky Healthcare Center include members of the Firelands Physician Groups as well as pediatricians associated with University Hospitals’ Rainbow Babies and Childrens unit.

Smith said one element of Firelands Physician Group she’s particularly proud of are the care coordinators, nurses who are part of the team in the pod and who work with patients coming out of the hospital or suffering from high risk conditions.

They can help the patients meet reasonable goals that will help them feel better. For example, if the patient is supposed to reduce sugar consumption, the care coordinator can ask if it’s necessary to drink five cans of soda pop a day. And if the patient had promised to walk on the high school track twice a week during the summer, that can be brought up.

The idea is to partner with the patient on practical lifestyle changes that can be achieved, Smith said.

Doctors who moved into the new building include eight physicians associated with Firelands Physician Group. In addition to Widmer, they are Dr. Thomas Conley, Dr. Eric Mast, Dr. Karl Oberer, Dr. Kaitlin Schwerer, Dr. Kevin T. Carnahan, Dr. Jennifer Kaple and Dr. Nataliya Bumagina. Bumagina is a pediatric medicine physician; the others practice family medicine.

The building also has four University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children Sandusky Pediatricians providers. They are Dr. Kimberly Vacca, Dr. Marin Waynar, Dr. Terry Wiseman and Ashley Folger, a certified nurse practitioner.