

New urgent-care centers coming

Patients will soon have more urgent-care options with the arrival of Richmond-based Patient First

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Patient First, the Virginia-based chain of urgent-care centers, will open two medical centers in the area in June.

The company has clinics under construction on Plank Road in Fredericksburg and on Garrisonville Road in North Stafford.

"Our surveys showed that there is plenty of demand for accessible health care" in Fredericksburg, said Dr. Pete Sowers, Patient First's chief executive. "It's a natural extension of what we've been doing for a long time."

Sowers founded Patient First in Richmond in 1981. Today, the company operates 26 medical centers and bills itself as one of Virginia's largest primary-care providers. Its clinics are located in Richmond, Tidewater, Baltimore and Southern Maryland.

The company is the second urgent-care chain to locate in Fredericksburg. NextCare, an Arizona-based company, formed a partnership with MediCorp Health System and began operations here in 2008.

Like its competitors, Patient First combines the services of a doctor's office with some of the after-hours capabilities of an emergency room.

Its centers are open every day, from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Offices are staffed by physicians and physician's assistants and have lab and X-ray capability. All major insurance plans are welcome.

Patients don't need an appointment. Usually they receive episodic care for routine illnesses and injuries, the kind of problems that might otherwise mean a visit to the ER.

"Most of the people who use our services have other physicians," Sowers said. "They come in when it's convenient, or when they can't get seen."

Some urgent-care firms, like NextCare, stop there and encourage patients to return to their regular doctors for continuing care.

"We believe urgent care is a supplement to the regular care provided by your family physician. We don't look at it as a replacement," said Kathleen Allenbaugh, MediCorp spokeswoman.

But Patient First and other urgent cares have developed a different model. If their patients find a doctor they like, they encourage them to return for regular care.

Patient First publishes its doctors' schedules online to make it easier for patients to make appointments. More than 60,000 of its patients have designated Patient First as their primary-care pro-vider on their HMO health insurance plans, said James Schulenberg, director of marketing and public relations.

"We encourage our urgent-care patients to become primary-care patients," said Dr. Michael Goeden, one of the founders of Prime Care, which has two urgent-care centers in [Spotsylvania County](#).

Patient First joins a crowded urgent-care market in the Fredericksburg area. Medic 1, with two locations, Spotsylvania Emergi-Center and Stafford Urgent Care are among its competitors.

Prime Care, founded in 2004, opened a second office last year. NextCare has three local centers and will open two more, in Woodbridge and Dumfries, this month.

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