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# Mayfield might add patient rehabs

## Surgery network looks at ways to thrive in medical market

BY CLIFF PEALE | [CPEALE@ENQUIRER.COM](mailto:CPEALE@ENQUIRER.COM)

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The Mayfield Clinic might add rehabilitation services at its Spine Surgery Center in Norwood, a move that probably is a model for future expansion at the world's largest independent neurosurgery practice.

There could be as many as 600 candidates for rehab services among Mayfield's patient base. That includes those who suffer from back pain but don't need surgery, those preparing for surgery and those who already have had surgery, said Mike Gilligan, Mayfield's chief executive officer. He said a pilot project could start early next year.

"We're looking at that now," Gilligan said. "It probably would be a partnership with a national provider."

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With 18 doctors and plans to add several more, Mayfield is one of the region's most successful independent specialty practices, bucking the national trend of high costs driving doctors into larger and larger groups.

Its network of surgery centers stretches from Middletown to Crestview Hills.

Mayfield isn't immune to the medical field's financial pressures. Total patient visits jumped about 5 percent to 21,000 last year, compared to 2006, and have grown about half since 2000. But total revenue grew only about 2 percent in 2007 and is expected to stay flat in 2008.

Gilligan would not reveal sales or profit levels.

That means that despite its prestige and billings of about \$1,600 for a cranial surgery and \$2,400 for a spine surgery, Mayfield still finds itself in a gentler version of the same volume squeeze as almost all other doctors.

"Mayfield's breadth and depth might make it different," said David Wiltse, a pulmonary care doctor who is president of the Academy of Medicine of Cincinnati. "All specialists now, it's more and more difficult financially to maintain a small practice. But Mayfield may be unique."

Mayfield officials credit its market dominance, a reputation that draws patients from other states and countries, and a nimbleness that comes from its independence.

"It brings the ability to move quickly, to respond to changes in the market," said Ronald Warnick, one of the 16 doctors who are shareholders in Mayfield and currently its chairman.

Surgical innovation still is the practice's calling card.

Last week, Mayfield surgeon Bill Tobler performed the region's first lumbar fusion spine operation that uses a minimally invasive technique on two levels of vertebra. The operation took place at Christ Hospital, where Tobler is director of neurosurgery.

"Our mission at Mayfield is research and teaching," Tobler said. "To me, that means trying new things. Research isn't just test tubes and mice in a laboratory, but the application of new things."

On the business side, the biggest driver of Mayfield's growth in recent years is Priority Consult, a

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program that evaluates patients' conditions quickly to see if they need an immediate appointment. That drove a 50 percent increase in the spine surgery business after it was introduced in 2001; Mayfield even has started selling the software to other practices.

In the last decade, the practice has invested \$23 million in its three biggest projects. In 1998, it opened an imaging center in Crestview Hills. In 2003, it opened the Precision Radiotherapy Center in West Chester. In early 2007, it opened the Spine Surgery Center in Norwood, with two operating rooms for outpatient surgeries.

But Mayfield's expansion model is for more new services and programs instead of huge investments in bricks and mortar, Gilligan said. He hopes the new programs will make it a magnet for more patients.

Kathryn Clarisey of Amberley Village, the patient in Tobler's fusion surgery, said that reputation helped her pick Mayfield and Christ Hospital.

"When you know you're going to have a procedure, you ask around," Clarisey said. "When I mentioned either Dr. Tobler or Mayfield Clinic, I got a real positive answer."

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