

New emergency room about to open at Watsonville Community Hospital

WATSONVILLE — Emergency care at Watsonville Community Hospital is about to take a giant leap forward.

The hospital is replacing its 14-year-old, 1,800-square-foot emergency room with an airy, new facility to serve the 26,000 patients who come to Watsonville Community for emergency care every year.

Due to open for business soon, the hospital's new "Emergency Center," located in a \$4.2 million building which also houses an outpatient care facility and a new laboratory, is the latest phase of a \$16.1 million construction and remodeling project begun in 1982. Illuminated by strategically placed spot lamps and natural light pouring through numerous skylights, the new center promises to be a dramatic improvement aesthetically over the cramped, harshly lit emergency room it will replace.

Watsonville Hospital's new emergency facility boasts 10 beds which can be monitored simultaneously from a central nursing station, an isolation room for patients with contagious diseases, a room for minor surgeries, a room for setting broken bones, a specially equipped room for treating patients with ear, nose and throat problems and a separate room for dying patients' grieving relatives.

According to Dr. Kent Benedict, a full-time emergency room physician at Watsonville Community since 1977, the new facility will not only enable the hospital to provide better care for the 150 to 200 "major trauma" patients it receives annually, but more efficient, cheaper care for those who come to the hospital with less calamitous problems.

Benedict, who led reporters on a tour of the new emergency center Monday, said waiting time for patients with minor ailments such as

sore throats would be held to 30 minutes at most, and said Watsonville Community would be able to cut costs and charges for treatment in such cases dramatically. The doctor predicted that the hospital would even be able to compete for business, to some extent, with "free-standing" privately-run emergency clinics.

Benedict said that hospital emergency rooms "will never be able to compete completely" with free-standing clinics, which only handle minor problems, because hospitals are "locked into" the costs involved in being ready to deal with major injuries and illnesses.

"We want to make it clear that when you come here, you're going to be treated like a human being and not as an object."

The public will have a chance to judge the new emergency care facility for themselves at an open house from 3:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Thursday.