

Doctor shares insight to show why patients go to Regional General Hospital

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WILLISTON – Jorge Perez, hospital owner, has put \$3 million into improvements and daily operational costs at Regional General Hospital in addition to the purchase price.

The hospital had been on at least a two-year road to complete recovery before Perez bought it, and the institution shines like a well-polished jewel in Williston today. That trend is carrying on into the future.

Progress at RGH continues, and Dr. John T. Chacko, a highly rated medical doctor and surgeon who specializes in urology, took a few minutes out from his service in the RGH Emergency Room on Monday morning (Oct. 1) to share insight from his perspective at the hospital.

Dr. Chacko, who will be 58 years old in February, first operated at this hospital in 1999 or 2000, he said.

The new owner is going to take RGH to the next level, Dr. Chacko said.

“We are going to expand on the emergency service,” he said. “We are going to add on urology, cardiology and nephrology.”

In regard to nephrology, RGH intends to partner with the University of Florida, Dr. Chacko said, and currently that is planned for a January start-up.

RGH is a 40-bed acute care hospital, Dr. Chacko said.

In addition to urology, cardiology and nephrology, RGH will be involved with urology, helping patients who among other things may be suffering from kidney stones.

The newly-renovated operating room will provide a place for procedures related to hearts, kidneys and prostates, he said. The surgeon recently completed a procedure in the RGH operating room.

Dialysis treatments will become available at RGH as well, Dr. Chacko said.

“There is no reason to go up to Gainesville or Ocala to get these kinds of services,” Dr. Chacko said. “As you can see, we are taking these patients with emergent conditions very effectively and very quickly. This is where you can have everything in one place. No delays.”

The lab is here. X-rays are here. The CAT Scan is here, he said.

Back in 2000, the county owned the hospital, Dr. Chacko said.

As with many community hospitals in the past 20 years, RGH has had its ups and downs, Dr. Chacko said.

Today, RGH is an excellent community hospital, serving patients with fine, individualized care.

“We depend on local people and the citizenry to support us,” he said. “Medicare and Medicaid have been cutting constantly; so, we have an ongoing problem.”

Dr. Chacko noted that patients from Lake County are making RGH their choice of hospital now. That is one of the places where he has a clinic, and he tells his patients that he is at RGH.

When they come to this hospital, he said, they are very pleased with the services provided – including the 24-hour emergency room.

Dr. Chacko explained that while he is a specialist in urology, he has a background in general surgery and pediatric surgery. The hospital in Williston, he said, does not have the luxury yet of having many physicians.

Therefore, given his skill of being able to practice more than just specialized medicine, Dr. Chacko serves patients wherever they need his medical talents.

He has been a practicing physician, including general surgery, for more than three decades now.

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In addition to the urological clinic at RGH, Dr. Chacko has clinics in The Villages and in Ocala.

He said there is a plan to create “800 number” to centralize a method to take patients, and there are other associate doctors who will be able to see patients on short notice.

“As you may know, The Villages has no urologist on call, except sometimes me,” Dr. Chacko said, as he spoke about the medical coverage area from Sumter County, through Lake County and all the way up to Leon County (Tallahassee).

Dr. Chacko said the word is starting to spread about what is already available at RGH and as the hospital continues with its planned expansion of services, this will become a very vibrant rural community hospital.

“In a few months,” Dr. Chacko said, “I think we will be very busy.”

The medical doctor provided understanding about practicing medicine today and in years gone by.

Back when he was studying medicine, the general surgeon practiced on pediatric patients to geriatric patients and every age between.

“You saw pretty much of everything,” he said, “all ages, across the board, all conditions. You were trained and prepared to tackle all of those (many forms of illness and injury that required surgery).”

“Now, doctors have become specialized and compartmentalized,” Dr. Chacko said. “And sometimes it helps to be so specialized in big, well-populated cities. But in smaller communities like ours, we need a broadly-trained traditional surgeon.”

“That’s what I realized here,” he continued. “On any day, you could have a patient with an amputated leg, or a woman with a fetus in distress, or a child, or a mother with problems. You don’t know what you are going to get here in a small community.”

Dr. Chacko said RGH is prepared for it. At the least, the patients can be stabilized in the emergency room.

RGH is onboard with teaching young doctors and nurses, Dr. Chacko said, in the near future. In conjunction with the University of Florida, RGH will help medical students learn about rural medicine, he said.

These medical practitioners will not be compartmentalized, he said, but instead will treat all comers. Whoever comes through the hospital’s doors for help, will find it here.

Dr. Chacko said the methods have gone full circle to return to this point of general medicine versus over-specialization. The training has to fit the needs of the community, he added.

This teaching at the rural community hospital will involve practical medicine with hands-on experience.

Whether it is a cut, a bruise or an amputated leg, the young doctors and nurses will learn how to treat the injury or illness, he said.

Dr. Chacko said he wants everyone to know about one patient who was treated at RGH. His mother came to Williston a year or two ago, he said.

“The people here treated her much better here,” he said. “She would be a witness for the care she received here as opposed to some other place. Bigger doesn’t always mean better. It was all personalized care. They gave her what she needed, when she needed it.”

She was treated with respect and care at RGH. Now, his mother is home, Dr. Chacko said.

“That is a testament as to what I believe we can do,” he concluded.