

hospital that's been shopping for a buyer since May.

The El Centro hospital, which is about 112 miles east of San Diego, would be Scripps' sixth hospital — and its first outside San Diego County. Scripps and

## Clinic Network Expanding to Get Ready for ACA

■ By MEGHANA KESHAVAN

North County Health Services will begin a \$7.5 million overhaul of its Mission Mesa campus in Oceanside, which it said will more than quadruple the size of the community clinic. It plans to break ground in early December.

NCHS, a San Marcos-based network of clinics, will use a \$5 million federal grant to help expand its pediatrics building from a 3,000-square-foot, six-exam room clinic to a 12,600-square-foot, 18-exam room building.

The expansion is part of the clinics' efforts to prepare for the implementation of health care reform with "a strategic plan to help support the increase in patients due to the Affordable Care Act," said **Irma Cota**, president and CEO of NCHS.

The new building will also offer a procedure room, two health education rooms, a lactation consultation room, a financial consultation room and a group visit room. The expansion is expected to be complete in spring 2015.

NCHS is a private not-for-profit organization that serves more than 60,000 patients each year at its 10 community health centers in Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside, San Marcos and Ramona, as well as through two mobile clinics. Its main patient base consists of people who are underinsured or uninsured; more than 95 percent are low-income families who earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

NCHS provides health care services ranging from dental care to radiology to disease prevention management programs. The Oceanside clinic serves about 5,000 patients per year, focusing on women's health and pediatric care.

"We want the community to see us as their complete medical home and come to us as a first choice, not a last resort," Cota said.

NCHS made an initial \$1.3 million investment in the Mission Mesa location in 2010, and it received a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Health and Human Services Administration in 2012. It is looking to foundation support and individual donations to finance the remaining \$2.5 million, said **Stacy Rungaitis**, director of fund development for NCHS.

"The grant doesn't cover the entire project," Rungaitis said. "This project will allow us to expand quality health services, at low to no cost, to our community including uninsured children and their families."

The hospital reached out to more than 30 organizations and chose Scripps to enter the next phase of negotiations because of its plan to expand El Centro Regional's existing services in Imperial Valley, he said.

Scripps could add a variety of medical services to the El Centro region, Scripps Health CEO **Chris Van Gorder** said. El Centro patients currently have to drive "over the hill" to San Diego to receive



Chris Van Gorder

system."

Because Scripps has a large network of physicians and established relationships with insurers, it could help El Centro Regional reduce system costs, Van Gorder said.

Gorder said. "Its payor mix is facing some difficulties, but that's why they need to reach out and join a larger health

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