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Fremont Medical Center Expands Its Range of Elective Surgical Services

Fremont Medical Center has expanded on its reputation as one of Arizona's premier trauma centers and busiest emergency rooms to offer expert elective surgical care in a wide range of subspecialties. The chiefs of the main surgical services discuss the procedures they offer.

Fremont Medical Center was one of the first Level One trauma centers in Arizona. Over the years, the hospital has earned a solid reputation for the expertise of its medical staff in the sphere of trauma care and emergency burn critical care. Recently, though, the hospital has expanded to become an outstanding general hospital while maintaining its distinction as a premier emergency and critical care facility.

Felix Unger, M.D., FACS, is Chairman of the Departments of Surgery at Fremont Medical Center. "We've expanded to be capable of providing specialty care in most other areas, including neurosurgery, non-cardiac thoracic surgery, vascular surgery, reconstructive surgery, podiatry, ENT, ophthalmology, craniofacial/head and neck surgery, oncologic surgery, and bariatric surgery. We also have a breast service for patients with breast disease of all types in addition to follow-up services for cancer patients. We have staff expert and trained in all these specialty areas.

"Board-level training and board certification are required for employment at Fremont, and many of our surgeons are double-certified. All our attending surgeons are

certified in their specialties and many have had additional fellowship training. That's applicable in trauma as well as in minimally invasive techniques and thoracic surgery."

Dr. Unger adds that Fremont has expanded to include a new building and new operating rooms. "Our new operating rooms have been constructed so we can offer all forms of minimally invasive surgery. We have a fellowship-trained laparoscopic surgeon offering the capability to do surgery using minimally invasive techniques when appropriate, and we also offer minimally invasive surgery in urology, ENT, orthopaedics, and the other subspecialties."

ON THE LEADING EDGE

Fremont is on the campus of the Oscar Madison College of Medicine and the hospital has been part of the network of hospitals that offer education to the school's medical students, residents and fellows. "This relationship has existed since the very beginning of this hospital and of the medical school," notes Dr. Unger, "and I think this is an important role for us to act as a teaching hospital for the medical school.

"Our relationship with the medical school is very close. Many of the staff members are graduates of the medical school and all staff members are faculty at the school, so this distinguishes our hospital a little bit.

"Another advantage of the relationship with the medical school is that it puts Fremont on the leading edge of developments. The hospital is stimulated by being in an academic atmosphere and, as a result, is probably somewhat more academic in its efforts and its pattern of care than you might find in a non-medical school hospital or non-teaching hospital. This is a teaching hospital for all intents and purposes but it's also a strong service hospital with a very large, active emergency room."

TRADITION OF EXPERT TRAUMA CARE

While Fremont Medical Center has expanded to provide services in nearly every medical specialty, it has continued to be one of Arizona's major trauma centers and the principal trauma center in Fremont.

"We have a trauma service with three certified trauma critical care attendings—people specially trained in trauma and surgical critical care—and our trauma service is very well-equipped and well-structured," notes Dr. Unger. "We have a burn unit adjacent to the critical care unit that is similarly well-fashioned and staffed by an expert plastic surgeon in the burn sphere. We can receive patients from other hospitals who need burn care or hyperbaric oxygen treatment.

"Among the hospitals that are primarily what some call 'public hospitals,' Fremont has always stood out as superior. It's always had a very solid reputation and one of the reasons is that we have the capability of handling just about any acute trauma problem. We have a helicopter pad so we receive some patients from the Greater Phoenix area hospitals with trauma transport—patients who are critically ill and require a Level One trauma center.

"Fremont Medical Center is not an ordinary hospital; it's a hospital that has expertise in a number of areas," concludes Dr. Unger, "and now has the capability to offer comprehensive services."

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Felix Unger, M.D., FACS, received his medical degree from Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and served his internship and surgical residency at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. He has been Chairman of the Departments of Surgery at Fremont Medical Center since 1988.

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Dr. Adler

"What the Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgical Institute [CSI] encompasses is all the specialties that deal with head and neck issues," explains Luther Adler, M.D., FACS, Director of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and the CSI at Fremont Medical Center. "These include oral and maxillofacial surgery, neurosurgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery, otolaryngology/head and neck surgery, and ophthalmology.

"CSI cares for people with congenital deformities like prognathic jaws or maxillas that are either too far forward or too far back. CSI also deals with pathology—people who have tumors of the head and neck—so we treat a lot of cancer patients and patients with other benign tumors. We also treat dental tumors like an ameloblastoma or odontogenic myxoma or giant cell tumors and other problems arising from the tissues involved in making teeth. We also do reconstructive surgery; for example, we'll transplant a fibula from the patient's leg and make it into a jaw."

Dr. Adler says cooperation among the multi-disciplinary team is essential: "We have a conference once a month where we present these cases and say, 'What's the best way to handle it?' The oral surgeon says, 'I think we ought to do this,' and other specialist will say, 'Why don't you do that?' We plan ahead and then we go in and do the case as a team. There are no turf battles at all—zero. We have one hundred percent cooperation among the services. It's unique in a sense that I don't know another hospital anywhere with the same degree of cooperation that CSI has here at Fremont."

Dr. Estero

"The bariatric program was started by me in 2001 and it's slowly grown over time," says Juan Estero, M.D., FACS, Chief of Service for Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery at Fremont Medical Center. "We've done over three hundred bariatric procedures so far. I do laparoscopic gastric bypass, sleeve gastrectomies, laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding procedures, and revisional procedures.

"We follow NIH criteria for identifying candidates for bariatric surgery—that is, any patient who is more than a hundred pounds over their ideal body weight or has a body mass index of more than forty. If they have a serious medical condition along with that—diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea—then even someone with a BMI of thirty-five is a candidate."

The surgeon enlists the expertise of other specialists in evaluating and optimizing the patient's health prior to scheduling any surgery. "Once we've decided on a procedure and I've gone over the options, results, post-op course, and possible complications with the patient, I order a complete work-up. This involves the patient going to see a

nutritionist, psychiatrist, gastroenterologist, and medical physician. In certain cases, I will also send them to a pulmonologist for a sleep study to see if they have sleep apnea. For some patients, I'll get a cardiologist's evaluation based on their medical history."

Dr. Estero says Fremont Medical Center's bariatric service is in the application process to be named a Center of Excellence—a designation given by Surgical Review Corporation, which is a medical society for metabolic and bariatric surgery.

Dr. Fredericks

"We provide care to genitourinary oncology, including prostate cancer, penile cancer, testicular cancer, bladder cancer, and renal cell carcinoma," says Dwayne Fredericks, M.D., FACS, Chief of Service for Urology at Fremont Medical Center. "We also provide quality of life improvements, including incontinence care for women and erectile dysfunction treatment for men. We also treat problems of bladder outlet obstruction, including benign prostatic hypoplasia and overactive bladder.

"We have state-of-the-art equipment at Fremont, as well as brand new ORs and excellent laparoscopic capabilities. We're doing our nephrectomies for kidney cancer laparoscopically and our endoscopy suite is top-of-the-line, too.

"We also have a unique clinic that you don't find at most institutions," adds Dr. Fredericks. "It's called a voiding dysfunction clinic. At the clinic, we do urodynamic studies and treat urinary voiding dysfunction problems. Our work-up at Fremont is pretty extensive and certainly up-to-par with some of your major centers in Phoenix."

The urology team consists of highly trained surgeons with excellent backgrounds, a chief resident, and residents from Desert View Medical Center who rotate through the

urology service. Dr. Fredericks adds that the members of the urology team will enlist the expertise of other specialists in cases where a patient's treatment needs extend beyond urology.

"At Fremont, we see a variety of pathology and sometimes it's quite complicated. In those cases, it's quite common for us to call on our colleagues in other specialties to get involved and bring in their own knowledge and experience to help design the treatment plans for our urology patients."

Dr. Willet

"Fremont has a Level One trauma unit, so the preponderance of what we do is fairly significant high-energy orthopaedic trauma," says Marcus Willet, M.D., FACS, Chief of Service for Orthopaedics at Fremont Medical Center. "This includes falls from heights, auto accidents, pedestrians struck by cars, and gunshot wounds. Over the past couple years, though, we have slowly increased our elective procedures with our subspecialty people, increasing the scope of what we do."

Fremont Medical Center's orthopaedic service offers fellowship-trained expertise in the areas of spine care, sports medicine/adult reconstruction, and pediatrics.

Spine problems such as herniated discs, spinal stenosis, failed back surgery syndrome, and vertebral fractures are treated by state-of-the-art procedures—often utilizing minimally invasive techniques.

The sports medicine and joint reconstruction program specializes in helping patients with joint injuries, especially older patients who suffer from arthritis. "We provide evaluation and treatment of sports and joint injuries; tendon, ligament, and

cartilage repair and reconstruction; arthroscopy, and joint replacement surgery," says Dr. Willet.

The range of pediatric orthopaedic problems the team handles includes fractures, bone diseases, bone and soft tissue tumors, bone disorders, syndromes, spinal deformity, kyphosis, and back pain.

"We hope to grow in the future and continue to meet the needs of the community we serve."

Dr. Jackson Miller

"One of my areas of interest and specialty is spinal cord injury, so I'm the guy they call if you're in a terrible accident and you've injured or damaged your spinal cord or you have an unstable fracture in your back," says Jackson Miller, M.D., FACS, Chief of Service for Spinal Surgery at Fremont Medical Center.

In addition to treating trauma cases, Dr. Miller says that the spine surgery team is trained and equipped to provide the full range of outpatient spine care through the hospital's clinic system.

"We take care of anything related to the spine, ranging from herniated discs to spinal stenosis, as well as tumors, infections and spinal deformity in children," says Dr. Miller. "Basically, we offer every kind of spinal treatment available.

"One of the new areas that we really want to expand on is scoliosis surgery. Scoliosis surgery, in a lot of senses, is easier than a lot of the other surgeries we do on younger people and yet we haven't been doing as much of it. It's an area we do want to expand upon and that's something we're going to be doing at the beginning of 2009."

Dr. Juanita DeLeon

"My work deals with women that have breast disease, ranging from cancers to benign breast disease," says Juanita DeLeon, M.D., FACS, Director of the Breast Health Center at Fremont Medical Center. "Surgically speaking, this includes simple breast biopsies and the spectrum of anything that relates to the breast for cancer work; in other words, mastectomies, lumpectomies and sentinel lymph node biopsies. The majority of my patients are breast cancer patients or breast cancer survivors because we do their surgery and then we follow them forever.

"We have a state-of-the-art breast center and we take a multi-disciplinary approach to patient care. Our team consists of me, plastic surgeons, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, and patient navigators, and we work with the patient to develop the treatment plan that best meets their individual needs."

Patient navigators are a unique and extremely important part of the breast program. "They're trained to be the patient's social worker, case manager, contact person, and friend," explains Dr. DeLeon. "Women diagnosed with breast cancer have a thousand things to do and need help to get through everything. The navigator is almost like their personal assistant and accompanies the patient to things like pre-op testing, breast MRIs, oncology appointments and plastic surgery appointments."

The Breast Health Center is also distinguished by the fact that there are representatives from the American Cancer Society at every breast clinic. The representatives contact each patient and assist them by putting them in contact with other breast cancer survivors and signing them up for free services the ACS offers.

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