

Swedish Covenant joins growing list of hospital urgent-care operators

By [Adam Rubenfire](#) | July 27, 2015

Chicago-based Swedish Covenant Hospital is expanding its Immediate Care Center program, joining a growing list of hospitals investing in urgent-care operations.

The hospital opened its center in Chicago's Sauganash neighborhood about a month ago, and held a ribbon cutting at a second location in the North Center neighborhood on Monday. Swedish Covenant's centers will have on-site X-rays and labs, offer vaccinations and school physicals, and treat all the common ailments and injuries that urgent-care centers often treat, including broken bones.

The hospital also hopes to add specialty services like orthopedics to the centers and have sub-specialists regularly rotate through the facilities. The Immediate Care Centers' services are very similar to urgent-care facilities but are billed as a Swedish Covenant Hospital outpatient location instead of as an urgent-care center, according to the hospital.

The frequent use of the name "immediate care" among Illinois urgent-care providers has historically stemmed from [a recently repealed regulation](#) that allowed only emergency rooms to use "urgent" in their name.

For Swedish Covenant and other hospitals, the facilities present an [opportunity](#) to expand a hospital's market territory and care for patients where they live, while also allowing for increased brand visibility. The hospital's Sauganash center is already halfway to reaching its projected volume of about 50 visits per day, according to Swedish Covenant CEO Mark Newton.

"I don't view this as (just) episodic one-time care," Newton said. "You don't just come in and get your cut taken care of. We're really interested in establishing ongoing relationships with individuals in these targeted communities."

A third of urgent-care centers are owned by a hospital or health system, or a joint venture in which a hospital or health system is a partner, according to a 2014 survey by the Urgent Care Association of America. The facilities are attractive because they give a hospital a "front door" in neighborhoods, don't require a certificate of need and are a source of downstream revenue from individuals who need to be referred to specialists or advanced diagnostic services within the health system, said Alan Ayers, vice president of corporate development for Concentra, an Addison, Texas-based operator of urgent-care and occupational health facilities.

"Overall, the demand for urgent care first and foremost has been consumer-driven," said Ayers, a board member of the association. "People like the convenience of a walk-in facility and the ability to see a doctor without having to wait for an appointment."

Concentra has joint venture deals with Catholic Health Initiatives, HCA and Tenet Healthcare Corp., Ayers noted. He added that entrepreneurial urgent-care operators are developing platforms for hospital systems that want to get into the urgent-care industry but need a partner with expertise.

The urgent-care industry is expected to grow in the coming years, with 88% of centers reporting to the Urgent Care Association that they expect to expand their operations and/or see an increase in patients in the upcoming year. About 83% of urgent-care operators said they grew this past year, with 40% specifically noting an increased number of patient visits in the past year.

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Adam Rubenfire covers breaking healthcare news and supply chain for Modern Healthcare. His beat responsibilities include capital equipment, group purchasing organizations, food service and general medical supplies. His work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Automotive News and Crain's Detroit Business. He has a bachelor's degree in organizational studies from the University of Michigan. He joined Modern Healthcare in 2014.