

New Dallas County Jail Medical Modification Project Sets the Standard for Jail Health Care

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The Dallas County Sheriff's Department celebrated the completion of the Dallas County Jail Medical Modification Project by hosting a ribbon cutting ceremony and tour of the new facility space on March 16, 2015. Construction on the project started in November 2012 and was completed in February 2015.

The Dallas County Jail Medical Modification Project, also known as the MedMod, is located within the North Tower Jail near downtown Dallas. It is a one-of-kind facility that was created by renovating and modifying 138,657 sq. ft. of existing space in the lowest three floors of the Lew Sterrett North Tower Jail. The result is a stand-alone, centralized medical/mental health services facility. It includes separate medical and mental health clinics, medical and mental health areas for inpatient care, a full-service pharmacy, a dental surgical suite, and a radiology unit, along with medical staff offices and conferencing space.

Each year, the Dallas County Jail books in about 100,000 inmates. Just over half of these inmates (55%) suffer from an acute or chronic illness that requires some degree of medical care. The MedMod facility will reduce the number of inmates who are sent to Dallas County's public health system emergency room for care, and it will provide medical and mental health care for the jail's average population of approximately 6,000 inmates. Parkland Health & Hospital System, the community's public health provider, provides all the medical and mental health care for the jail and was closely involved in establishing the jail's new facilities.

As of May 2015, the MedMod facility has begun to provide some limited clinic services while the staff training phase is under way. Operational advantages are already occurring. The majority of patients receiving dental services (>450/month) previously were being transported to another facility within the county, and that no longer takes place. Once fully online by mid-summer 2015, the MedMod will improve the delivery of medical and mental health services to Dallas County Jail inmates, and it will offer services not usually found in a jail system. Inmates will have greater access to care on-site, and they will continue to benefit as services are expanded in the future.

Moving inmates from jail to the hospital is time-consuming and staff-intensive, adding to the cost of incarceration for the taxpayer. Security is always a concern as well, so it is always better to avoid

removing offenders from the secure environment whenever possible. Some detainees still will be sent to an off-site emergency room, depending on the condition needing treatment. Over time, DCSO hopes to add new on-site capabilities in order to reduce the number of trips outside the secure area.

Jail operations will benefit because the MedMod will consolidate many medical services in one area of the jail complex, as opposed to having them spread throughout the campus as has been the case up to now. This will reduce inmate movement, though an officer escort will still be needed when inmates move to and from the clinics.

The MedMod is not intended as a permanent housing location, which is generally how DCSO's previous infirmary was operated. Instead, the MedMod is intended to operate similarly to a regular hospital, where patients stay only as long as necessary. Once an inmate is assigned to the MedMod, they will remain there until they are well enough to return to general population housing.

MedMod will be staffed with around 130 detention officers, five supervisors, and one commander. This is an increase in total current staffing of about 48 positions. These numbers may change over time as new services are added or previously unforeseen issues are addressed.

Care Clinic

The Care Clinic, which will have open inmate seating in the waiting area, will consolidate services in one location as well as allow for expansion over time and the addition of more services in the future.

The current plan is for the Care Clinic to have business hours 5 days per week. If feasible and beneficial to Sheriff's Office operations, service hours could be expanded in the future.

Facilities include:

- Seven examination rooms equipped with air, oxygen, and suction;
- A radiology suite that includes a Panorex X-ray apparatus for dental imaging;
- A room for specialized procedures;
- A centralized laboratory;
- A provider work area with telemedicine capability;
- A mental health consultation room; and
- A dedicated EMS entrance.

Medical screening is done at initial booking, so by the time new inmates arrive at MedMod they already will have been medically assessed. The new area has an EMS entrance, which will mainly be used for inmates being transported to the hospital for conditions not treatable at the MedMod.

Rapid Assessment Teams, comprised of Parkland Jail Health staff, currently conduct daily medical screening rounds within every tower in the jail system. This activity will continue after operationalization of the new area.

Anyone who needs a bed and ongoing care for a specific or severe condition will be assigned to an infirmary bed or the mental health unit within the MedMod until their condition is improved to a point where they can be returned to general population. People who are detoxing will be placed in the infirmary until their detox regimen is complete.

Figure 1a. Nurses' station in the MedMod Care Clinic, view 1



Figure 1b. Nurses' station in the MedMod Care Clinic, view 2



Medical Infirmary

The Medical Infirmary section of the MedMod is on the ground floor of the converted space. It is equipped with an overhead bed numbering and intercom system as well as cardiac arrest and duress alarms. Telemetry is a new feature. It will be monitored from the main monitoring area located within New Parkland Hospital. Monitoring telemetry technicians will have access to the jail-based nurses “24/7.”

The facility was constructed to accommodate a CT scanner at some future date. It is anticipated that as the years go by, the cost of this type of technology will shrink to the point that it will be cost-effective to perform this service within the jail. Until that time arrives, that particular area will be re-purposed for other activities.

The medical infirmary will have the capacity to house 136 inmates.

	Men	Women
Acute hospital beds	44	
Step-down hospital beds	44	
Women’s infirmary		20
Single and safety cells	19	9
ADA single cells (included in above)	6	2

Figure 3. MedMod examination room



Figure 4. MedMod physicians' workroom



Mental Health Infirmary

The Mental Health Infirmary section of the MedMod is located on the first floor of the jail. Services here will be expanded to include more programs than have been available in the past. DCSO will continue to provide mental health services in other parts of the jail complex, and the inmates who have more acute mental health issues will be housed in the new area.

Most inmates in the mental health infirmary will be in dormitory housing. Each dormitory has an adjacent, connected program room and consultation room. Single cells will be available for inmates who are in crisis or who otherwise are not appropriate for housing in a dormitory setting.

The mental health infirmary will have the capacity to house 146 inmates.

	Men	Women
Dormitory beds	53 (4 dorms)	28 (2 dorms)
Single and safety cells	42	23
ADA single cells (included in above)	4	2

Construction Challenges

As a construction project, the MedMod also has a unique story. The DCSO jail facility is sited along the Trinity River across from downtown Dallas. Due to its proximity to the levee, the Corps of Engineers

would not allow the construction of any new structures or footprint additions to the jail complex. This forced the agency to carefully consider the entire project, and it added time and increased the cost of the overall project.

DCSO ultimately chose to convert a basement area below the North Tower jail facility that had previously been used for storage and other non-essential functions. The converted ground floor space had been used for surplus property storage and some Parkland uses. The first floor area had been used for an inmate sewing/repair shop plus some storage. Now, the MedMod occupies the ground and first floors, and the pharmacy and Parkland administrative space are located in the converted basement.

The construction phase presented a wide range of challenges, since the jail (our largest) had to remain 100% operational at all times while the new medical care facilities were being built right below it.

- Some of the jail facility's support beams and columns had to be left in place and worked around to maintain structural integrity of the building.
- Several complete power outages were necessary during phases of construction. This required certain parts of the facility to be on generator power for extended periods of time while excluding areas where electrical work was being conducted. The DCSO jail complex had been built in phases over many years, so no one was completely sure which circuits would be affected until the switch was turned off.
- To make it as easy as possible to accommodate facility security concerns and inmate movement, most work that could have significant adverse effect was done at night while inmates were sleeping.

The project involved the renovation of nearly 140,000 total square feet on three floors, including 25,000 on the basement level, for a total project cost approaching \$53 million.

Future Outlook

DCSO anticipates that the MedMod project will reduce the jail's operating costs by making it less necessary to transport jail inmates out of the facility for medical care. DCSO does not yet have a specific estimate on those savings, since the MedMod is not fully operational at this time. Overall costs to the county for inmate medical and mental health care may also be reduced, at the same time that services for inmates are being enhanced and expanded.

"The Medical Modification Project facility promises to change the nature of medical treatment at the jail, and it could not have been accomplished without the teamwork and consolidated efforts demonstrated by the Parkland Health & Hospital System, the Dallas County Commissioner's Court, and the Sheriff's Department. We are extremely proud in being able to put forth such an innovative facility," said Sheriff Valdez.

Sharon Phillips, the Parkland executive vice president who oversees jail health care, stated, "We're setting the standard for jail health care, and people are coming to us from jails around the country and the world to see what we're doing."

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Document available at:

http://community.nicic.gov/blogs/national_jail_exchange/archive/2015/06/10/new-dallas-county-jail-medical-modification-project-sets-the-standard-for-jail-health-care.aspx

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