

[Ellwood City Ledger](#)

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As demand continues to increase, Jameson Hospital is taking steps to expand its emergency department as well as add surgical capacity at its North Campus along Wilmington Avenue.

The emergency room expansion received a push as U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire, D-4, McCandless Township, presented a check to Jameson Health System for \$296,000 on Monday.

The emergency room will be expanded from 8,000 square feet to 12,000 square feet to keep pace with a 30 percent increase in emergency room visits over the last several years since it acquired the former St. Francis Hospital, also in New Castle.

About 39,000 people visit the hospital's emergency department annually, Altmire said, adding that the largest health-care facility in Lawrence County and the communities it serves deserves a state-of-the-art emergency department.

Thomas White, president and chief executive officer of Jameson Health System, said the system, which operates two hospital buildings and about a dozen community health-care facilities, employs about 1,500 people. These employees will benefit from the public-private partnership that the grant funds from the federal government represent, White said.

The funds will help keep the expansion projects moving forward, White said. He also said the projects will help protect employees by providing for job retention, "which is important for economic development in Lawrence County."

Expansion of the hospital will also improve access to health care as well as keep it affordable, White said.

The emergency room expansion will see the facility increase by 20 to 22 beds from the existing

21 beds. In addition, nine operating rooms will be replaced with six larger, more modern operating suites.

Overall, the project will cost between \$12 million and \$17 million. The federal matching grant received through Altmire will help with the expansion, which has already received pledges from employees and medical staff.

While an addition is being built, surgical operations will temporarily take place at Jameson's South Campus, the former St. Francis Hospital.

During Altmire's visit, he discussed other health-care concerns, ranging from proposed cuts to physician reimbursements for Medicare patients to how medical care is affected by rising fuel costs. Altmire said he recently visited a manufacturer of power wheelchairs in Plum and was told how gasoline prices have resulted in increased supply costs to the manufacturer as well as increased costs to those needing the wheelchairs.

White asked Altmire whether some type of subsidy could be made available to hospitals to offset rising energy costs.

"We must do something; this (energy costs) is a national crisis," Altmire said.