

The first building on Chubbuck's new medical campus is up and running, but if you step inside, be prepared to have your temperature taken and don a surgical mask.

That's the new normal at the Idaho Kidney Institute, the first tenant at the Knudsen Boulevard medical campus. In an effort to make sure the patients do not contract the novel coronavirus, extra precautions have been put in place at the clinic.

"People with kidney disease, people on dialysis, they're always at the highest risk categories for COVID-19, so that has really changed the way we practice," Dr. Fahim Rahim of the Idaho Kidney Institute said. "(We have) a whole different quarantine process, wearing masks, all that stuff. Just trying to keep those patients safe. That has really added a lot to the work and the day-to-day routine."

That routine now includes deep cleaning between every patient.

"That's a lot of work for staff," Rahim said.

Because of the coronavirus outbreak, the open house for the 14,000-square-foot Idaho Kidney Institute building, called Matt's Pavilion

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— Dr. Fahim Rahim, regarding protecting his patients from the coronavirus

in honor of dialysis technician Matthew Lee, who died in a motorcycle crash in May 2018, has been postponed. The facility has been open for patients for a little more than a month.

"We are fully open, and all patients are getting care here," Rahim said.

Idaho Kidney Institute, which has six other locations in Idaho, is doing what it can to keep its patients safe — and that includes treating them over the phone.

"We are really encouraging patients to do telehealth right now," Rahim said. "For 90 percent of our regular visits, we are asking them to communicate through the phone. We have changed the way our workflow is, and that's the best way to do it."

If patients do have to come into the building for treatment, Rahim said one of the facility's benefits is that it's away from the Portneuf Medical Center campus, meaning there's lots of space between his patients and other sick people.

"We are in a new, nice, clean facility. We have more space. We are fairly away from a lot of issues with the hospital," he said. "That is a big medical campus. There's just too much foot traffic. So this has been good because it's helping keep our patients away from the hub."

Still, despite the outbreak, construction on the medical campus, which Rahim is heading up, is continuing. The groundbreaking for phase two of the medical campus — which will be the Idaho Kidney Institute's flagship office — will take place within the next couple weeks.

"It will contain kidney doctors, heart doctors, we'll have a lab, ultrasound imaging," Rahim told the Idaho State Journal in November.

Beyond the flagship office, Rahim has other big plans for the Chubbuck medical campus.

"It's a five-year process. So the phase three will be extending it to other facilities," he said. "Hopefully a pharmacy, laboratory, more

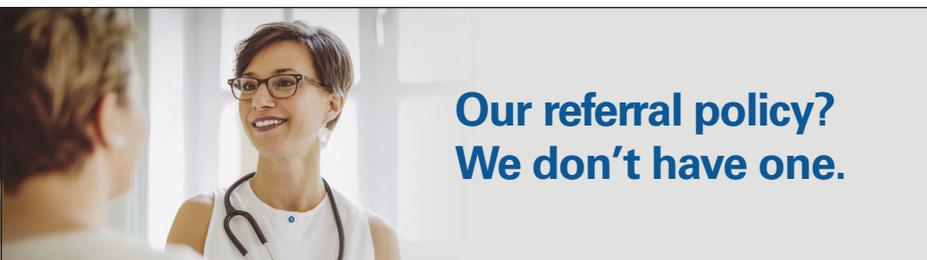
medical offices will be part of that extension. The issue with health care is it's a very slow process, and it's very expensive to build and to establish these things. It takes partnerships. It takes a lot of money and a lot of effort. And then the eventual goal is just like we have the new Idaho Falls community hospital."

Rahim said the current coronavirus outbreak is a perfect example of why Pocatello could use a community hospital. Community hospitals help ease the burden on a community's bigger hospitals by treating simple problems and leaving the coronavirus patients to the larger entity.

"We need a hospital that can take care of small, simple problems, and a lot of very complicated ICU stuff and trauma needs to be combined in one place," he said. "You don't want to keep very sick people with too many infections with regular people. If you're admitted for simple problems, you don't want to be surrounded by very serious issues."

Rahim will need bigger partners to get the hospital idea off the ground, but he's hopeful it will happen.

"We're partnering with anyone and everyone who is willing to share our vision," he said in November. "That's what our partnership is about. It's not a financial structure; it's more about sharing the vision, which is to be able to provide low-cost, good-quality care."



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