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## NEW CONFLUENCE HEALTH PACU DESIGNED FOR PATIENTS, ALONGSIDE STAFF, WITH AN EYE FOR THE FUTURE

**Wenatchee, WA:** Persistence and vision pay off and, for the new Confluence Health PACU, the third time was the charm.

Confluence Health recently opened its newly expanded PACU which doubles its available beds to 20 to allow for better care of patients while supporting 12 operating rooms. However, it was a long process that faced a variety of hurdles before coming to fruition at the end of August 2022.

The PACU (Post Anesthesia Care Unit) or Recovery Area is a department that closely monitors and cares for patients after surgeries and procedures. It is an extension of the operating room and is supported by surgeons, anesthesiologists, and nurses. Patients are kept there until fully recovered from anesthesia.

“An investment in the PACU is an investment in better patient outcomes,” commented Tracey Kasnic, chief nursing officer for Confluence Health. “This unit is uniquely trained to understand the needs of patients who have just come out of surgery with anesthesia, and our staff of medical professionals are able to provide the specialized care needed to allow for the best possible outcomes.”

A new PACU had been a dream for many years but had faced challenges as other projects took precedence and funding over the years. One area that had to be overcome was the design of the new facility. Staff and managers knew that they wanted this to be someplace special and to reflect the needs of those providing the care in how it was put together.

“We knew the best way to make the new PACU the most efficient and effective was to design it alongside those who knew the needs: our staff,” remarked Liz Dittbrender, perioperative service director at Confluence Health and one of those directly involved with the project. “We asked our staff to imagine how things could be done better, done in a way that reflected the reality of their work. For example, the original design would have had twice as many supply areas as we ended up making. But our nurses pointed out that a supply area that reflected our 2:1 care ratio would make things more efficient. We listened, and they were right.”

The entire project was built towards efficiency and a utilization of space in the best way possible, including the construction of procedural rooms. A major improvement over the previous PACU, these new rooms can serve as a location for minor procedures that in the past would have tied up an operating room, despite being procedures that didn't really need a full operating room.

“This flexibility and forethought will allow us to free up that real estate for the more complex procedures, benefiting patients, providers, and the whole community,” continued Kasnic.

This forward-thinking also led to the installation of an economizer during the PACU remodel. A component of a building's HVAC system, an economizer helps conserve energy by constantly checking humidity, temperature, and more to be as efficient as possible, such as not running as many air exchanges when an area is not in use. While often used to keep utility bills low, these systems also help keep a building green. In an area with low utility costs, the inclusion of the economizer demonstrated Confluence Health's commitment to the environment and keeping an eye to the future.

“I think it is an incredible thing that speaks to the vision for the future and a heart for sustainability,” said Dittbrender. “Being green mattered enough to us that we followed it through despite already low utility costs because it was the right thing for our community and patients and will serve us well far into the future.”

### **About Confluence Health**

Confluence Health serves the largest geographic region of any healthcare system in Washington State, covering over 12,000 square miles of Okanogan, Grant, Douglas, and Chelan counties. Confluence is one of only two locally-lead healthcare systems in the state with the purpose of maintaining availability and access to high-quality, cost-effective healthcare services for North Central Washington. The Confluence Health Board of Directors provides governance for Confluence Health, the Clinic, Central Washington Hospital, and Wenatchee Valley Hospital, and includes nine community board members and six physician board members.

### **For More Information**

Katie Grove, *Marketing & Communications Director*

[katharine.grove@ConfluenceHealth.org](mailto:katharine.grove@ConfluenceHealth.org)

509-885-0444

Adam MacDonald, *Corporate Communications Program Manager*

[adam.macdonald@ConfluenceHealth.org](mailto:adam.macdonald@ConfluenceHealth.org)

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