Healthy, high-performance healing environment earns 2nd 'world first' rating

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The LEED Platinum South Tower at Dell Children's Medical Center in Austin, Texas. Credit: Marc Swendner, Seton Healthcare Family

It takes an extraordinary effort to become the world's first LEED Platinum certified hospital. But it takes an extraordinarily dedicated team with an unwavering commitment to sustainability to do it twice. Our team is proud to announce that Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, a member of the Seton Healthcare Family, is now first in the world — twice — for LEED certification achievements. Its Third Bed Tower addition, now named the W.H. and Elaine McCarty South Tower, is the first LEED for Healthcare (LEED-HC) project to achieve Platinum certification. In 2008, the original hospital was the first hospital to achieve any LEED Platinum certification.

This achievement is credited to our committed team of leaders who believe in providing better care for their patients through green building practices and our collaborative project team that believes in integrated, mission-driven design. It's a powerful one-two punch that results in a healthy, high-performance healing environment. At Dell Children's, we recognize that healthy environments have a profound, measurable effect on the healing process.

The spirit of the project was captured in the sustainable design mission statement, calling for, "a state-of-the-art healthcare facility dedicated to providing premium care to the children of Central Texas in an environment that promotes human and environmental health ... embraces the principal tenet of medical ethics 'First, do no harm,' and the triple bottom line parameters of social, environmental and economic sustainability."

The 76,000-square-foot bed tower increases the hospital's patient capacity by 40 percent with 72 new beds, a state-of-the-art epilepsy monitoring unit, many family-centric features and an expansive outdoor healing garden. The project earned 86 points, including 17 out of 18 Sustainable Sites points, 23 out of 24 Optimize Energy Performance points and six Innovation in Design points, including LEED-HC pilot credits for PBT Source Reduction and Chemical Avoidance in Building Materials (phthalates). Several notable achievements, like 96 percent construction waste diversion, 73 percent sustainably sourced products and 100 percent furniture and medical furnishings compliance, demonstrate the breadth of the team's efforts.

The project achieved an impressive reduction in energy consumption with an improved thermal envelope, high-efficiency glazing, reduced interior lighting power density and LED lighting, an outside air unit with an enthalpy wheel, air handling units with fan arrays and variable frequency drives, solar photovoltaic and solar thermal panels, and a district energy heating and cooling system with a co-generation plant. Patient rooms are equipped with occupied/unoccupied controls that automatically set lighting levels, temperature and ventilation.

Dell Children's sustainable design is credited with improving staff recruiting and retention rates. It is considered an asset by our community, and it serves as a public education model for green building practices and excellence in healthcare. It is the only dedicated freestanding pediatric facility in the region and the only Level I pediatric trauma center in a 46-county area and beyond.

The Seton Healthcare Family, a member of Ascension Health, is the leading provider of comprehensive, advanced healthcare services in Central Texas. Seton operates more than 90 clinical locations including five major medical centers, two community hospitals, three rural hospitals, an inpatient mental health hospital, three primary care clinics for the uninsured and several strategically located health facilities. For more information, visit www.dellchildrens.net.

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