



Rendering: Architecture Inc.'s  
Lehigh Acres hospice

## HEALTHCARE

# A State of Wellness

Healthcare construction is a commercial bright spot, with new buildings long on convenience and comfort.

Throughout Florida, healthcare is one of the strongest growth sectors in commercial real estate. Consider: In Sumter County, Promise Healthcare is starting to build the first of three long-term acute-care hospitals in Florida. Osceola Development and Land Co. is building an outpatient center designed for "green" LEED certification in St. Cloud, south of Orlando. In rural Lehigh Acres, Hope Hospice is planning a 24-bed facility, and in Pembroke Pines, Sky Development will begin construction this fall on a medical office complex.

An aging population and patient desire for greater convenience and more upscale facilities are helping to drive demand.

"The median population age and growth in our state is rising, and

along with it the demand for quality long-term hospital care for life's most serious, complex illnesses," says Peter R. Baronoff, chairman and CEO of Boca Raton-based Promise Healthcare, which recently broke ground on a 40-bed facility in The Villages in Sumter County, with 60-bed hospitals in Miami Lakes and Fort Myers next on the agenda.

Healthcare projects for Osceola Development and Land Co. of Celebration include a diagnostic imaging and outpatient surgery center in St. Cloud, a nursing home in Ocoee and a dental office in Celebration, says President Chad Pert. "Most projects are build-to-suits," Pert says. "Because of the financial markets, there is less speculative building today. However, a lot of physicians are taking advantage of lower construction costs to

move forward with new facilities."

Patient access and "flow" were key factors in designing Osceola's St. Cloud Medical Arts and Technology Park as a cluster of four buildings with a shared registration and waiting area, says Larry Cohan, principal and CEO of BC Architects in Coral Gables.



Rendering: Sky Development's Park Plaza Executive Center in Pembroke Pines

Patient convenience was also important to Sky Development, which incorporated ground-level retail, restaurant and banking services into its plans for Park Plaza Executive Center, a 160,000-sq.-ft. medical/professional office facility adjacent to Memorial Hospital Pembroke in Pembroke Pines. Construction on the first four-story building is scheduled to begin in October.

Patients also prefer medical offices and hospitals with a warm, hotel atmosphere rather than an institutional atmosphere. They also like food courts rather than cafeterias and outdoor areas or atriums with natural sunlight.

"An attractive and inviting waiting room conveys the feeling that the patient will be getting high-end care," says Ted Sottong, vice president and co-owner of Architecture Inc. in Fort Myers, which designed the Lehigh Acres hospice and is overseeing Cleveland Clinic Florida's expansion projects in Westin and West Palm Beach. "This is the way the healthcare market is moving." ■