



## Merrimack Valley Hospital partners with Lahey Clinic; Pact may bring Lahey doctors to MVH

By Jason Tait , Staff Writers  
Eagle-Tribune

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HAVERHILL - The legacy of late city native Dr. Frank Lahey, founder of Lahey Clinic, is coming home.

Merrimack Valley Hospital is partnering with Burlington-based Lahey Clinic in a move that may bring Lahey doctors to Haverhill so patients can receive treatment close to home, said W. Hudson Connery, president of Essent Healthcare, Merrimack Valley Hospital's parent company.

The partnership will first send patients from Haverhill to the clinic for its expertise and specialized physicians. The two hospitals also are considering sending doctors from Lahey to Merrimack Valley Hospital, Connery said.

Lahey needs space to treat patients and Merrimack Valley Hospital needs doctors, Connery said.

"We've got the plant and population, and they've got physicians and patients," he said. "They will give us more surgical specialists and other experts and improve our reputation."

Lahey Clinic specializes in the treatment of strokes, brain aneurysms, liver transplants and the heart.

Merrimack Valley Hospital has seen many changes this year, most recently with the hiring of new Chief Executive Officer Michael Collins.

Other changes include selling its new four-story medical office building to a national real estate investment trust and closing the 16-bed transitional care unit that tended to patients waiting to be discharged or needing nursing home-level care.

Collins, who most recently was senior director of financial operations at Emerson Hospital in Concord, said one of his top goals is to attract specialty doctors from Boston-area hospitals to work in Haverhill, even on a limited basis.

Too many local people feel they need to go to Boston for special services and he wants them served locally, he said.

"I think a lot of folks believe that a lot of patients need to go to Boston for their care," Collins said. "Really they are going there for the doctors."

Lahey Clinic is in the process of signing the contract that would allow Merrimack Valley Hospital doctors to easily transfer patients from Haverhill to Burlington, said Robert Schneider, the clinic's senior vice president. As the organizations get comfortable with each other, an exchange of doctors may begin, Schneider said.

"That's where this thing can go," he said.

The Haverhill hospital was previously the city-owned Hale Hospital prior to being sold and privatized seven years ago.

Mary Ellen Daly O'Brien, a nurse at Merrimack Valley Hospital and a city councilor, said she is excited about the Lahey partnership.

She said any partnership with Boston-area hospitals that would allow Greater Haverhill patients to get care locally is good.

"That can put a real hardship on family or an aging spouse," O'Brien said of traveling to Boston hospitals.

As for the many changes at Merrimack Valley Hospital - including closing the transitional care unit for people who have had surgery and are not ready to go home, and the sale of a new wing of the hospital - Daly O'Brien said there should be no fear that the hospital is faltering, just the normal nervousness that comes with change.

When the new CEO arrives, "hopefully that is going to quiet those anxieties," O'Brien said.

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How it works

- \* **Merrimack Valley Hospital** to send some patients to Lahey Clinic for its expertise and specialty care.
- \* **Lahey Clinic** considers sending its doctors to Merrimack Valley Hospital so patients can receive treatment without having to leave Haverhill.

BOX FOR JUMP PG

Changes at Haverhill's hospital this year

- \* **Robert Allen**, chief executive officer at the hospital for the last 17 months, left for a job in Utah.
- \* **The hospital sold** its new four-story medical office building to a national real estate investment trust. The 54,000-square-foot building cost about \$13 million to build.
- \* **The hospital is closing** the 16-bed transitional care unit.

\* **Michael Collins**, most recently the senior director of financial operations at Emerson Hospital in Concord, has become Merrimack Valley Hospital's CEO.

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About Lahey Clinic

**Founded:** In 1923 by Haverhill native Dr. Frank Lahey (1880-1953)

**Location:** Burlington

**Physicians:** 480

**Nurses:** 4,600

**Specialties:** Treatment of strokes, brain aneurysms, liver transplants and the heart

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