

Community Meetings: St. Joseph Medical Center Paulsen Pavilion – Oct. 13, 2025

Audience Questions

Q: What can PeaceHealth do ensure helicopters fly the agreed upon flight path?

A: Airlift Northwest pilots are instructed to follow approved flight paths. However, for safety reasons—such as weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances—they may adjust their route. Additionally, St. Joseph Medical Center is located within the airspace of Bellingham International Airport, and air traffic controllers may redirect flights as needed.

Airlift Northwest pilots are highly trained professionals, and safety is always the top priority. When deviations from the standard flight path occur, Airlift Northwest maintains close communication with the PeaceHealth Executive Team to ensure coordination and transparency.

PeaceHealth has reviewed helicopter and flight activity in the area and found that much of it is unrelated to hospital operations. Many flights are conducted by other agencies, such as Border Patrol and Homeland Security.

Q: Do you have community benefit for people/communities of color and those who are low income?

A: PeaceHealth's Community Health Pillars focus on supporting communities with the greatest needs, including communities of color and those with lower incomes. We offer financial assistance in various forms and actively support ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) programs to help individuals and families who are working but still struggling to make ends meet.

Q: What percentage of the population that comes to the hospital is covered by Medicaid?

A: The percentage of patients covered by Medicaid varies month to month, but typically falls in the mid-to-high teens for our general patient population. Among OB patients, the proportion covered by Medicaid is notably higher.

Q: Are you using AI a lot now?

A: AI in healthcare is rapidly advancing, with applications that improve efficiency and accuracy. Current uses include enhancing electronic health records, analyzing medical images and assisting clinicians by highlighting areas that may require closer review. These tools support providers in making more informed decisions and improving patient care.

Q: Can you give an estimate of the cost amount of what patients will save by not having to take the ambulance from the helipad to the ED, once the new helipad on the pavilion roof is built?

A: Ambulance charges are not set by the hospital; they are determined by the patient's insurance coverage or by the ambulance company. Because of this, we do not have a specific cost estimate.

Some helicopters will continue to land at the ground-level helipad, and those patients arriving via U.S. Coast Guard or Navy helicopters will still require ambulance transport to the

Emergency Department. These military helicopters are too large and heavy to use the rooftop helipad.

Q: Do you see changes in inability to get in to see doctors? Are you recruiting?

A: Yes, we are actively recruiting. Like many healthcare organizations, we face challenges in ensuring access to care. In addition to physicians, we also utilize advanced practice clinicians—such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants—to help patients receive timely care. Our focus is not only on attracting talented providers but also on retaining them. Recruitment and retention depend on factors such as the cost of living in our community, the number of graduates from medical programs and our ability to maintain a supportive, efficient practice environment.