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Women's health practice gets off the ground

In an unprecedented move, Camellia Women's Health signs lease for new high-rise on Capitol Mall

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Kathy Robertson](#) Staff writer

Camellia Women's Health is going where the patients are — nine floors up.

The longtime local obstetrics and gynecology practice has leased space in the U.S. Bank Tower, the newest and arguably the most prestigious high-rise on Capitol Mall.

In what is believed to be a first for a medical group and Capitol Mall, the doctors will pay Class A rent to provide convenient service to existing patients who work downtown and to attract new patients an elevator ride or short walk away.

"We're bringing New York City health care to Sacramento," said Dr. Marvin Kamras, a founder of Camellia Women's Health who began exploring the idea five years ago. "We thought that, like other major cities, we should go to them."

The demographics are right, given the large concentration of working women with insurance on Capitol Mall and in state office buildings to the east. And the new business could help balance the books in a practice in which 35 percent of the patients are on Medi-Cal, the government health care program for the poor.

"We want to expand the practice, and we want to expand it to the group of patients with (private insurance)," said Kamras, who will work in the new office part time. "We always have and always will continue to take care of the underserved in Sacramento, but it has been a financial challenge."

A doctor's office is a new use for high-rise developer David Taylor, who says the only medical tenants he's leased to before are the trade associations and lobbyists who represent them.

"Initially, we questioned whether it was the right use," Taylor said. "But talking to women who work for me and in the area, it's clear it ... would be attractive to professional women with large constraints on their time — and there's a density of those kind of people here."

'A killer building'

Camellia Women's Health signed a seven-year lease in December for 1,756 square feet on the ninth floor of 621 Capitol Mall, next to the fitness center. The deal is worth about \$480,000.

The doors will open May 1. The office will have three exam rooms and be open 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays; it will remain open during the lunch hour to accommodate busy patients.

It's been a long time coming.

Historically, doctors' offices have been located in the suburbs, where patients live, Kamras said. That changed in the 1970s and '80s to geographically centered care around a hospital or health system. While convenient for doctors, the arrangement was not especially convenient for patients.

With more women working, it has become increasingly difficult for them to go to the doctor without missing work.

Camellia Women's Health was founded in Carmichael in 1977. An office on Auburn Boulevard was added around 1990; a third on Sierra College Boulevard in Granite Bay opened five years ago, about the same time doctors started looking downtown.

Space was limited. The group looked at older high-rises on Capitol Mall, but the only available space was too large or didn't meet their needs.

Then, 621 Capitol Mall was built. The group toured the building and signed on. With anchor tenant **Downey Brand LLP** in more than 101,000 square feet on five floors, plus other tenants, the building is 65 percent leased.

"It's going to be nice to have someone close," said Mary Martinelli, a partner at Downey Brand. "Good for David Taylor for thinking outside the box."

Karen Taranto, a longtime local health care consultant, has seen doctors locate in the core areas of New York and Boston, but "certainly not in Sacramento."

"It's a very progressive idea," she said, "and could be a wonderful contribution as more and more women try to use the noon hour to



Dennis McCoy | Sacramento Business Journal

Dr. Marvin Kamras and his partners will open the new office of Camellia Women's Health on May 1 on the ninth floor of the U.S. Bank Tower, at 621 Capitol Mall in downtown Sacramento. It's a first to have a health care practice occupying space on Capitol Mall. "We're bringing New York City health care to Sacramento," Kamras said.

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purchase services in a more convenient location.”

Taylor’s only concern was that young children might run the hallways and disturb other tenants, but the group agreed to handle the problem. Most patients will be coming from work and will not have kids in tow.

“Obviously, we have not seen a lot of this in our market, but as it gets more dense, I think we’ll see more of it,” Taylor said. “We consider it an amenity.”

So do patients.

“It’s so much more convenient than taking time off or not going to work at all,” said Jennifer Saul, a Camellia Women’s Health patient.

“It’s essentially two exits — seven minutes — from this office, as opposed to half an hour,” added Saul, a legal secretary with the litigation defense firm of **Low McKinley Baleria & Salenko** in Natomas.

Sue Nielsen, another patient and administrator at **Segal & Kirby** at 770 L St., says it’s about time there are more services available for women who can’t leave downtown during the day. She knows people who switched dentists in order to get somebody downtown.

“I really hope workers take advantage of this; that would encourage more services to locate here,” Nielsen said. “Besides, it’s a killer building.”

Balance the business

For Camellia Women’s Health, patient convenience is only one part of the equation. Growing numbers of well-insured patients could boost the group’s bottom line, too.

Camellia is profitable, but that’s taken some doing, given that a third of its patients are covered by a program that doesn’t cover the cost of care.

“We need to balance the practice and offset poor reimbursement from Medi-Cal,” Kamras said.

If anybody can make something new like this work, it’s Kamras and his partner, Dr. Stephen Polansky, said Bill Sandberg, executive director of the **Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society**.

“Dr. Polansky is one of the most effective business people I’ve ever met,” Sandberg said. “He’s an astute negotiator with a reputation for being a good dealmaker.”

Camellia Women’s Health

Business: Obstetrics, gynecology and women’s health

Founders: Dr. Marvin Kamras and Dr. Stephen Polansky

Work force: Staff of 50, including seven doctors and five nurse practitioners

Locations: Carmichael, Auburn Boulevard in Sacramento and Granite Bay. A new office will open at 621 Capitol Mall in May

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