

NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, April 11, 2008

Onsite health clinic firm sees major growth ahead

Nashville Business Journal - by [M.B. Owens](#) Nashville Business Journal



Todd Stringer, Nashville Business Journal

Rutherford County employee Gale Wood has her blood pressure checked by Mila Davis, a CareHere registered nurse.

CareHere, which provides onsite health clinics that help save companies money on employee health care expenses, plans to expand. The Brentwood-based firm has operated clinics serving Rutherford County government employees since 2004 and recently expanded the number of clinics to five for the county's approximately 5,000 employees. A sixth clinic is in the works.

For the county, the payoff has been huge. The company has already saved Rutherford County an estimated \$2 million a year.

"It is really quite remarkable of all the savings generated by the use of these onsite clinics," says Jeff Craig, former human resource director of Rutherford County, who is now the human resource director for the town of Smyrna.

The formula is simple. The county pays for the use of the clinics by its employees and their family members. The clinics are staffed by physicians or nurse-practitioners and a nursing assistant. Patients are asked to fill out a health assessment questionnaire and the results are used to develop a program to aid at-risk patients.

Employees keep their regular health insurance.

The health assessment is a key part of the savings. By identifying potentially big health risks early, the subsequent treatment plan can prevent them from becoming a serious problem that requires more aggressive - and more costly - care.

The savings started the first year the program was introduced in Rutherford County.

"There are immediate savings and long-term savings," says Bob Shupe, president of ESP Inc., a fee-based consulting firm headquartered in Brentwood.

Employers also end up with a reduction in health care cost inflation.

Health care expenses typically increased in the lower to mid-teens percentage-wise each year for health care in Rutherford County. With CareHere, costs for Rutherford only increased about 2 percent.

"The trend increase is really good," says Lois Miller, insurance director for Rutherford County. "For 2007, the county experienced \$1.8 million in claim savings due to the program."

There are also advantages for physicians and employees. Physicians don't have overhead costs, such as medical record keeping and staff, since CareHere pays for all of those expenses. Liability insurance is cheaper as well.

Employees end up with shorter wait times than at traditional physician offices, because CareHere patients register online or by phone for a specific time and are allocated 20 minutes. No other patients are scheduled to be seen during that period. Traditional physician offices typically overbook and a patient can end up waiting for hours.

The clinic visits are free to employees and their families.

Pharmaceuticals, many of which are kept in stock, are given out free.

Additionally, the clinics are close to where patients work so they can be back at work quickly, which is good for the employer and the employee.

bowens@bizjournals.com / 615-846-4251

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