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CareHere clinic saving Gainesville money

The 1-year-old Gainesville CareHere clinic open to city employees and their families has been successful in improving employee health while reducing medical costs, according to city administrators.

Cindy Mallett, the city's risk manager, said since the clinic opened last September 62 employees who used the clinic's services were diagnosed with diabetes or hypertension. Four others learned from medical professionals that they were susceptible to prostate cancer while two more quit smoking, she said.

As a result of those discovered conditions, projected savings for the city is \$718,701, Mallett said.

"That's a significant financial savings, but it's also for the health of employees," she said. "... One of the reasons we opened the clinic was to really target employees' health and well-being."

Mallett said two-thirds of the city's roughly 700 employees, including firefighters and police, have been taking advantage of the CareHere clinic's services. She said high blood pressure and high cholesterol are the highest health risk factors city employees have, according to clinic reports.

Gainesville City Councilman George Wangemann said the city will continue running the clinic to save costs and improve employee health.

"I think we're on the right track to gain a reasonable return on our investment in the plan — not only on the plan, but the investment in people's lives," he said. "... Those things make them healthier and more effective city employees."

City officials estimated it would cost between \$50 and \$75 per month per employee to run the clinic, and monthly operations per employee are costing the city \$52, Mallett said. She said, also, that wholesale medications saved employees and the city about \$36,000 when compared to retail prices.

The city budgeted about \$87,000 for the renovations of the building on West Ridge Drive in front of the Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center, but the total construction cost was less than \$85,000, according to the city's former human resources director Joan Sheffield.

The clinic, housed in the city's A-1 building, was expected to save the city \$181,300 in health care costs in its first year.

"I think Gainesville is ahead of the curve," Mallett said. "I think you will start to

see more organizations and governments doing this.”

Also at its Thursday work session, City Council members OK'd the city's cooperation with Keep Hall Beautiful to participate in the America in Bloom contest that reviews cities based on their floral, forestry and environmentally friendly grounds.

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