

Sheriff set for health care clinic

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The Lee County Sheriff's Office plans to open an in-house medical clinic for employees and their dependents this summer, a move private companies and governments have tried elsewhere to reduce health care costs.

Sheriff Mike Scott told Lee commissioners about the plan Tuesday.

Scott did not reveal specifics of the project, including its cost of operation, staffing and range of services, during the brief presentation.

In an e-mail to The News-Press, Scott explained the expected cost savings by

writing, in part: "projections and careful review of other such clinics around our state and nation are that our savings via a redirection of costs will be significant."

He described the services that will be provided at the clinic only as "medical services."

Such clinics often employ their own in-house physicians and/or nurse practitioners, who are paid set salaries, and offer lower cost pharmacy services.

Typically they are managed by third-party providers.

A 2008 study by human resources consulting firm Hewitt and Associates found start-up costs can

range from the tens of thousands of dollars to several million dollars.

Cost savings depend on how often employees use the clinics. In the successful cases, organizations realized between 5 percent to 25 percent savings after several years, according to Hewitt.

The sheriff's office clinic will be in a building under construction on Metropolis Avenue, off Daniels Parkway, said department spokesman Tony Schall.

The building is owned by Taybil Enterprises, according to the sheriff.

Taybil owns a building in the 14300 block of Metropolis, south of Daniels, according to the Lee County Property Appraiser's Office.

Scott declined to provide the terms of the lease contract, saying that information would have to be obtained through a formal information request under Florida's open-records law.

The News-Press filed such a request Tuesday afternoon.

Taybil representatives could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Tammy Hall, Lee County Commission chairwoman, said she was unaware of the idea until Tuesday.

The sheriff's office receives \$161 million in annual funding from the county's \$400 million operating budget. It employs about 1,500.

Commissioners approve funding, but it is up to sheriff to decide how to spend it.

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"From his perspective, he sees it as a big money saver for him," Hall said. "Maybe it's something we want to look at as a model for the county. Who knows?"

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