

Lee County sheriff unveils clinic savings

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1:10 A.M. — A private health care provider is promising to save the Lee County Sheriff's Office almost \$7.2 million in additional medical costs over three years as part of an in-house medical clinic it will operate.

The Tennessee-based company, CareHere!, manages similar clinics in 17 states, primarily in the south.

"We currently have enormous costs," Sheriff Mike Scott told WINK News, which partners with The News-Press. "The reality of it is, we have to keep our people healthy; we have to keep them, we have to keep our plan healthy."

The sheriff's office currently spends more than \$20 million on employee health care. Health care costs are expected to grow either way, but the CareHere! deal is projected to slow increases.

The clinic, at 14311 Metro Parkway, will provide at least one on-duty staff medical professional, such as a physician and/or a nurse. Employees and their dependents will not have co-pays, and prescription drugs will be free.

Scott released the terms of the deal Wednesday following an open-records request by the News-Press.

Included in the contract is an estimated \$20,000 startup cost for medical and office supplies; between \$33,310 and \$38,972 in annual rents

during the five-year term of the contract; and \$23 monthly fees to CareHere!.

Total start-up costs, according to the sheriff's office, would be \$154,928.

The sheriff's office will not pay the salaries of any doctor or nurse staffing the facility. Rather, CareHere! will contract with the professionals individually and determine their schedules.

The service is expected to begin in August.

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