



June 11, 2009

## Palm Bay plays doctor and saves | VIDEO

Clinic provides bonanza, cuts health costs

*BY KIMBERLY C. MOORE  
FLORIDA TODAY*

Palm Bay police Sgt. James Richmond had a doctor's appointment recently for his regular physical exam at the city-sponsored health clinic. He showed up 10 minutes early, was the only patient in the waiting room and was immediately shown to an exam room.

The 17-year department veteran had blood drawn, his weight and eyes checked, an electrocardiogram performed, his lungs X-rayed and then was examined by Dr. A. Michael Kemp. An hour after he walked in the door, Richmond was finished and was on his way to work without having to pay a dime.

Palm Bay City Manager Lee Feldman and Deputy City Manager Jon Lewis several years ago began investigating the possibility of opening a city health clinic to supplement workers' use of Blue Cross/Blue Shield network doctors. The officials were hoping to battle back against the skyrocketing costs of health care.

Last year, the city's clinic opened its doors and, by all accounts, has been huge success -- saving the city more than a half-million dollars in medical expenses during a one-year period.

And, officials say, it is a growing trend among large employers. Locally, for example, Parrish Medical Center opened a clinic Tuesday to treat its employees.

The Brevard County School District Public Schools is exploring a clinic as an option for its 9,000 workers.

"It's a great benefit to city employees," said Richmond, who also used the clinic in January when he had the flu. "They gave me free medicine -- antibiotics -- and within a couple of days, I was better."

### Growing trend

The clinic is run by CareHere! and Crowne Consulting Group.

And clinic officials say this is a growing trend. Other entities in Florida using clinics run by CareHere! and Crowne Consulting Group include the cities of Apopka, Ocala and Ocoee; the St. Johns County School District; and Charlotte County.

"Something had to give in this environment of revenue cutbacks and rapid health insurance cost increases," Ocoee Human Resources/Risk Management Director Jim Carnicella said. "Rather than continue decreasing benefits and shifting more costs to employees, we contracted with CareHere!"

Carnicella estimates that Ocoee has saved about \$1 million since opening the clinic in April 2008.

Parrish Medical Center in Titusville also recently partnered with CareHere! and Crowne Consulting to operate a facility for its employees, which it saw as the most cost-effective way to handle the situation. The clinic opened Tuesday.

"We anticipate lowering our health care costs by a significant amount, while enabling our employees to receive quick care for minor health care conditions, such as colds, flu, slight fevers and other issues," Parrish spokeswoman Natalie Sellers said. "The objective is to give employees quick access to care for those minor conditions and reduce health care costs for employees and for the hospital. Everyone wins."

Harris Corp. operates a clinic for its nearly 15,000 employees and dependents to defray costs and provide quick access to doctors. The clinic has operated since 1997.

"It's a good way of creating healthier employees and having some control over care," said Frank Bright, owner of Medical Technology Transfer Corp., a private company that runs Harris' clinic.

Bright said the Harris Family Health Clinic operates a little differently than Palm Bay's. Patients pay a \$15 co-pay. In addition, prescriptions are available on-site for purchase.

Harris pays an annual administrative fee, but Bright declined to say how much that is.

## Time for patients

The CareHere!/Crowne Consulting clinics all are set up to see one patient every 20 minutes, while most private-practice doctors commonly double-book appointment times.

It's not just a benefit for the patients. The employees say they enjoy their jobs much more because there's less stress.

"I had been practicing in the community and became disgruntled with the current situation with trying to rush patients through to maximize the number of patients," Kemp said.

Kemp added that, in private practice, he received a bonus for seeing more patients than average under his employment agreement.

"Here, we're able to spend as much time as we like with patients," Kemp said. "We can really give the patients the time they need and the proper care."

## Additional Facts

About Palm Bay Employee Health & Wellness Clinic

- **What's available:** Palm Bay city employees and their dependents can go to the Palm Bay Employee Health & Wellness Clinic for doctor visits, blood work, X-rays and lab tests. Non-narcotic medicine also is dispensed on site. Their visit and medicine are free to them, although the city pays a \$23 fee for each city employee every month to pay for administrative costs, supplies and five employees' salaries.
- **Staffing:** In addition to Dr. A. Michael Kemp, the clinic employs Carol Beasley, who wears several hats. She is a radiology technician, clinic coordinator and medical assistant. Two registered nurses "job-share" to create one full-time-equivalent position. There also is another doctor available to fill in when Kemp is off. A nutritionist, physiologist, pharmacologist and 24-hour nurse hot line all are available to patients via the companies that run the clinic: CareHere! and Crowne Consulting Group.
- **Operating hours:** The clinic operates 44 hours a week, but not on weekends.
- **Who's covered:** 1,850 employees and dependents are covered by city insurance. Because Kemp sees only patients who are 8 years old or older, the clinic serves about 1,400 people.
- **Self-insurance:** There are two types of health insurance: buying a policy with an insurance company, which most large employers do; or self-insuring by paying into a health fund and using that fund to pay for employees' doctor visits and treatments. The city of Palm Bay is self-insured but pays Blue Cross/Blue Shield a fee to use its network of doctors and process the city's health care bills.
- **The cost savings:** Palm Bay spent \$7.8 million in the last year on employee and dependents'

health care, including the clinic. Clinic and city officials calculate the clinic saved the city more than a half-million dollars between March 2008 and March 2009.

Here's why: Instead of going to their regular doctors in the Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance network, employees and dependents used the clinic 6,164 times.

The services provided would have cost about \$1.36 million if employees had seen outside doctors. It cost the city \$840,715 to operate the clinic, and city officials see that as a savings of \$520,545. --

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