

Media Relations

UNH Opens Employee Health Clinic To Cut Costs; Improve Efficiency

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire is aggressively pursuing health care savings and one of the first programs in this comprehensive effort is the opening Feb. 27, of an on-campus clinic for faculty and staff of any University System of New Hampshire institution. Employees will no longer have to leave campus during the day for medical care, x-rays, and routine lab tests and administrators expect the facility to be self-sustaining in less than three years.

"Medical costs continue to rise on average 8-10 percent a year," said Dick Cannon, UNH vice president of finance and administration. "That just isn't sustainable when we're spending nearly \$50 million a year on medical benefits at UNH alone. It is imperative that we find new and innovative ways to cut costs and piloting an on-campus employee clinic is one step in that process."

According to a 2011 College and University Professional Association Human Resources survey about a quarter of the 415 responding institutions provide faculty and staff access to on-campus medical services. Very few offer it as an employee benefit as well as a cost-containment tool. The recent shift to self-insured status means the university now has the opportunity to create innovative, high quality health care delivery system options and make health care more convenient, efficient and cost effective.

The clinic is not a replacement for primary care, but is more like an urgent care facility. Care for acute infections (ear and sinus infections, pneumonia and conjunctivitis), injuries (lower back pain, sprains, and strains) and other problems like rashes, insect bites and headaches will be available. No referral from a primary care physician is necessary for employees on Harvard Pilgrim insurance. At this time only employees of USNH can use the clinic, not dependents or retirees. In addition, lab work, radiology and a pharmacy are available.



One area where the university hopes to see an immediate savings is in laboratory tests. A comprehensive lab workup performed in an independent lab like Lab Corp or Quest averages \$15. The same test averages from \$92 to \$146 at local hospitals. "There are limited non-hospital options for lab and radiology services across the state which makes it very difficult for us to achieve that savings," said Amy Schwartz, director of the university's Health Care Cost Containment initiative. "By providing it right here on campus we can better control overall cost while providing our employees convenient, high quality services that could translate into less expensive benefits for them in the future."

If the project is successful and employees use the clinic, it may be expanded to include dependents and add services such as physical and occupational therapy. The days and hours of operation may also be expanded. The employee clinic has its own space, separate from students, and will have a separate entrance once the new business college is complete. During the academic year the clinic will be open Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.


"We know that improved access to primary care prevents illness, modifies risk and helps to better manage disease," said Kevin Charles, executive director of UNH Health Services. "Making it easier and more convenient for our employees to access high-quality health care will lead to a healthier population and better productivity."


Charles added that a survey of faculty and staff about a year ago found a majority would use an on-campus clinic that was separate from students.


While no employee will be required to use the clinic those involved in its development believe the convenience and quality will bring people in. Faculty and staff will be able to schedule appointments online,

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often same day, and reserved parking is available for patients. If requested clinic staff will also coordinate all care with the employee's primary care provider for continuity of care, and online secure messaging of lab test results is available.

During the first months of operation clinic staff will assess what works for employees and what doesn't. The grand opening will be in the fall and reflect any "fine tuning" to address additional employee needs. Employees who use the clinic are encouraged to provide feedback about clinic services to assist staff in planning future programming.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

For more information visit <http://www.unh.edu/health-services/employee-clinic/>

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