

Orlando Business Journal - September 21, 2009
</orlando/stories/2009/09/21/story9.html>

ORLANDO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, September 18, 2009

Local execs back new health clinic for working uninsured

Grace Medical Home to open doors Nov. 1

Orlando Business Journal - by [Melanie Stawicki Azam](#) Staff Writer

Brian Paradis and Sherrie Sitarik work at local competing hospital systems, but the two executives both see the same kind of patients in their emergency rooms: the working poor who don't qualify for Medicaid and can't afford private health insurance.

That's why the pair are working together to help create **Grace Medical Home**, a new clinic that will offer primary care for the working uninsured. It's slated to open in November.

Sitarik, executive vice president of **Orlando Health**, and Paradis, chief operating officer of **Florida Hospital**, both sit on the clinic's 16-member board. And their two hospital systems have offered the clinic in-kind support, including equipment and staff expertise.

One reason the hospitals want to help: Grace Medical will give the working poor "a medical home, so they won't have to use the ER as much," said Sitarik.

Emergency rooms are the costliest way to get health care, but many uninsured people show up at them for minor illnesses or injuries because federal law requires hospitals to evaluate and stabilize all patients who go there, regardless of ability to pay.

Uninsured people accounted for nearly one-fifth of the 120 million hospital emergency department visits nationwide in 2006, said the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**.

To be sure, local low-income, uninsured residents already can seek medical treatment at Shepherd's Hope clinic or at a network of 11 primary care clinics, known as PCAN, run by Orange County, local hospitals and other agencies.

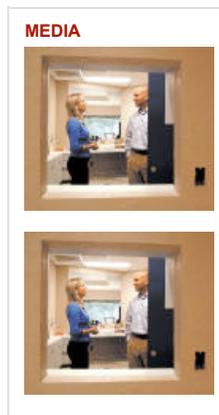
Shepherd's Hope treats uninsured patients at clinics open one or two nights a week, but it's not designed to be a permanent medical home. The PCAN clinics see the uninsured, plus those with insurance, Medicare or Medicaid, which is a federal- and state-funded health insurance program for the needy.

Grace Medical Home will serve only uninsured patients who don't qualify for Medicaid or Medicare, and who live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, said Dianna Morgan, another board member.

The 2009 federal poverty level of \$22,050 in income for a family of four means Grace Medical would treat a family that size with an income of \$44,100 or less. Medicaid covers people who fall below 133 percent of the federal poverty level, or an annual income of \$29,326 for a family of four. So Grace Medical will treat "the ones who fall through the cracks," said Paradis.

Grace Medical Home will see 24,000 patients a year in a 5,500-square-foot medical office at 51 Pennsylvania St. A board member bought the building, which Grace is leasing at a below-market rate with an option to buy.

Zazi Properties LLC bought the building for \$1.45 million in 2008. Zazi Properties is owned by



retired Orlando attorney Richard L. Fletcher Jr., a Grace Medical board member.

Grace Medical has hired three doctors and two nurse practitioners, and will hire up to 12 more workers in 2010.

Grace Medical, which will rely on donations for funding, expects its first-year operating budget to be \$750,000. So far, it has gotten about \$300,000 in cash donations with \$250,000 in pledged gifts, and must raise another \$200,000.

Additionally, Grace has gotten \$200,000 in donated equipment, supplies and building renovations.

Grace Medical will offer a coordinated “medical home” approach by creating a partnership between the doctor and patient, which is part of the national health reform discussion. Some contend it’s a more effective way to deal with chronic illnesses and provide preventive care, while critics fear it will shift financial resources away from other sectors of the health care system.

Some proposed federal legislation would have Medicare and Medicaid do pilot programs that reimburse medical home projects, said a Sept. 11 Kaiser Health News article. Florida created a Medical Home Task Force this year and will submit a plan for a Medicaid medical home pilot project to state lawmakers by Feb. 1.

Grace Medical Home President Dr. Marvin Hardy said, “If this is successful, we hope it can be replicated in Seminole or Volusia counties.”

mazam@bizjournals.com | (407) 241-2895

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.