

Companies turn to work-based clinics to cure health care woes

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While some Philadelphia-area companies are exploring the idea of bypassing health insurers and contracting directly with providers, a few have taken a different approach. They have entered into deals with companies to operate onsite health clinics for their employees.

The Vanguard Group, the Malvern-based investment management company, opened its first “CrewCare” clinic in Malvern in 2011. CrewCare is managed by Premise Health of Brentwood, Tenn. Since that time, Vanguard opened additional clinics in North Carolina and Arizona along with a second in Chester County.



STAHLER, KEITH
Clemens Food Group's work-based employee wellness center

“By offering an onsite clinic service, we’re able to provide our crew members — what we call our employees — with access to quality care at a low cost—with the benefit of being on our campuses and just a short walk away,” said Vanguard spokeswoman Alyssa Thornton. “Our clinics benefit both Vanguard and our crew.... The convenient locations and short wait times make it easy for crew members to access the care that they need on their schedules.”

The clinics offer access to acute care, primary care, preventive care, chronic condition management, physical therapy, and health coaching. Preventive care services are provided with no copayments. Other medical care provided at the clinics carry copayments of \$10 to \$35, depending on the medical plan the person selected.

The CrewCare clinics also support Vanguard wellness programs by coordinating annual biometric screening events, consulting crew members on their health results, and managing onsite flu shot campaigns.

The impact of the onsite clinics, according to the company, include:

- A 66 percent increase in annual physicals from 2016 to 2017,
- More than 1,400 employees selecting the clinic as their primary care physician,
- A more than 90 percent generic prescribing rates within the clinics at all locations in 2017, and
- Insurance reports showing a decline in emergency visits and inpatient admissions.

Mason Reiner, founder of R-Health, an Elkins Park company that provides “enhanced primary care” directly to employers and public sector employees, believes the on-site health clinic strategy has limitations.

“It takes a fairly substantial capital investment, so you have to have a large number of employees to justify it,” Reiner said. “It doesn’t increase access to care for dependents and it can also fragment care. People like to have primary care where they live. When they are sick they don’t want to have to run to the office.”

Clemens Food Group of Hatfield, parent company of Hatfield Quality Meats and Nick’s Saugage Co., had a company fitness center for years before deciding to explore doing something more for its workers,

A three-member team that included the company’s vice president for human resources and an executive vice president toured other business to learn how they were enhancing their employees health care. They encountered a number of companies with what they considered to be "a great" fitness/wellness center or primary care facility or a comprehensive occupational health facility.

“In the end, we saw value in doing all of these with excellence, and believed they could be high value for both team members and the company,” said Craig Edsill, president of Clemens Food Group..

Clemens in late 2014 opened a 25,000-square-foot family wellness center that consists of a primary care clinic, an occupational care clinic, a fitness center for working out, and a gymnasium for team sports.

The company contracts with a third-party vendor it declined to identify to manage the primary care clinic where the services include routine checkups, immunizations, lab tests, acute care for sicknesses such as sore throats and earaches, and chronic disease management. The clinic also has a diabetic program that provides free diabetic supplies, labs and quarterly checkups for employees.

“We have been very pleased at the value our team sees in the wellness center as a whole,” said Ruth LoRegio, wellness manager for Clemens Food Group. “In today’s war for talent, we believe this center is a difference-maker by providing our team value of peace of mind and well-being with convenience.”

Clemens’ health care cost per employee in 2017, as compared with fiscal 2014 before the center opened, was down 24 percent. “It’s very difficult to say this was all due to the wellness center project,” LoRegio said, “but we are confident it has been a component of our health care cost success.”

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