



# DEER PARK GAINS LARGE-CITY MEDICAL BENEFIT

By **James Stokes**, City Manager, City of Deer Park

City of Deer Park employees and families now have a medical benefits feature usually seen only in large cities and towns, their own on-site clinic. The clinic has been opened to give city employees and their dependents a faster and less expensive option for preventative and basic health care. The clinic serves the 290 full-time city employees, retirees, and their dependents, totaling 620 enrollees.

## On-Site Clinics Usually a Big City Benefit

Large municipalities with 5,000 or more employees frequently have on-site clinics. A typical implementation involves significant clinic build-out costs, start-up fees, plus pass-through staffing and operations costs. The Deer Park clinic, operated through a partnership between Houston firm Medicine At Work and the City's benefits carrier, TML MultiState Intergovernmental Employee Benefits Pool (IEBP), has fees through a simple capitated rate plan.

## A Team Approach, with Advanced Technology

The Deer Park clinic can serve the smaller population by using an innovative but well-proven care method. The clinic is staffed by a paramedic and health coach who takes patients' vitals and asks questions regarding health and symptoms before contacting an on-call, board-certified emergency room physician to interact with patients via a video screen, live video, and audio medical examination tools. The medic in the room with the patient acts as the doctor's fingertips, using imaging medical tools and technology including scopes and stethoscopes, all under the direct view of the attending physicians. The technology allows the physician to magnify or minimize images or freeze them for better inspection. With the exception of simple weight or blood pressure checks, each visit engages the doctor for examination and treatment. The secure video technology, examination tools, and care protocols were developed at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston and have been refined through use in UTMB programs since 2001. Benefit carrier IEBP and the clinic work closely together analyzing medical gaps in care information, utilization trends, and treatment episode costs

to ensure the best and most efficient care is provided to eligible employees, dependents, and retirees, and in this way performance-based clinical excellence is achieved.

### Managing Out-Of-Pocket Costs

Under this program, costs of the health clinic are rolled into the health benefit contributions/premiums presently paid to Deer Park's benefit carrier, IEBP. There is no cost to any employee or covered dependent that utilizes the clinic for preventative care services such as wellness activities and routine physicals. Employees on the city's PPO plan would normally pay 30 percent of costs incurred for medical services should they go elsewhere, but at the new clinic these employees pay nothing for the same care. Employees on the city's qualified high-deductible plan will pay \$35 when using the new clinic for basic, non-preventative care as opposed to paying for all medical costs at another facility until they meet their annual deductible. This approach keeps the city's qualified high-deductible-health-plan (HDHP) and health savings account (HSA) program in full compliance with the applicable tax regulations.

### Convenience Drives Compliance

The facility is located at an economic development center within the City and is open from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Patients can call or email ahead for appointments or can walk-in. The clinics provide greater access to care for city employees than if they had to travel to a doctor's office. This convenience and lower cost strategy helps encourage city employees and their dependents to seek preventative care, as well as earlier medical attention for emerging health problems.

### Important To Prevent the Negative Effects of Deferred Care

As qualified HDHP and HSA become more common, an emerging concern is that employees and family members will defer both preventative and diagnostic care, believing they are better off "saving up" their resources for when they may get "really sick." In addition to the negative impact of not catching preventable conditions early and causing unnecessary escalations, this will eventually drive higher costs. Both the City and IEBP believe that keeping the employees and dependents engaged in health care through low out-of-pocket services like the clinic is an investment in preventing or reducing medical problems and their costs.

### Reducing Time Away and Improving Productivity

"When considering the overall impact of clinic use, we also consider non-medical costs such as lost work time

### On-Site Clinic Services

On-site clinics offer a range of services including:

- Routine medical care needs (cough, cold, flu, sinus, allergies, aches, pains)
- Prescriptions when needed sent to local pharmacies
- Preventative care visits
- Wellness biometrics (lab tests and screenings)
- Wellness counseling (weight loss, activity, nutrition)
- Flu shots
- Immunizations
- Sports/school physicals
- Job physicals
- Pre-employment physicals
- Drug screening

Appointments are scheduled or can be walk-in service. Employees, retirees, and dependents learn about the clinics through in-person seminars, promotional mailers and posters, city websites, and email. Some cities use the clinics for on-the-job injuries.

and productivity," City of Deer Park Human Resources Director Bill Philibert said. "To that end, we've removed barriers to usage such as concerns over losing work hours or utilizing sick time to go the doctor. Because IEBP provides enrollee information to the clinic, employees don't spend the first 15-20 minutes of their visit filling out repeat forms or paperwork. This allows the total time per visit to average between 20 and 30 minutes. Additionally, the city provides a limited amount of release time to employees for clinic visits, so in many cases, the employee loses no work time and does not have to use their sick time for the clinic visit. We believe we've developed a win-win-win model with the clinic – as it benefits our employees, dependents, and retirees, it benefits the city, it benefits IEBP, and it benefits Medicine At Work (the clinic provider)."

### Bringing Cities Together

Both the City of Deer Park and IEBP see a future where adjacent municipalities and/or political subdivisions can come together to create economic and medical services advantages through shared clinics located conveniently to the partners. In this way, even the smallest cities, towns and/or other political subdivisions can obtain the ease of access to healthcare that dedicated, on-site clinics can bring – all while improving and managing employee health and controlling costs. ★