

Health-care program pays doctors and patients to improve

BY KIM ARCHER
Tulsa World Staff Writer
10/4/2008 12:00 AM

Like most every business or town in the U.S., the city of Duncan found itself unable to contain runaway health costs.

"If they reduced benefits, the union would strike," said Jeff Greene, CEO and president of MedEncentive, a system that improves health care and reduces costs through incentives for doctors and patients. "Could they ask providers to take a cut? Or raise taxes? The answer was no."

Greene presented the city with his new program, and Duncan became MedEncentive's pilot project.

City Manager Clyde Shaw said: "We reviewed it and could see nothing but positive benefits. We are a self-insured city. So we are always looking at ways to control our costs."

Four years later, Shaw said, the city continues to contain health-care

costs to 5 percent to 10 percent each year, while overall health-care costs rise 20 percent to 30 percent a year, he said.

The program is the brainchild of Greene, who had worked as a medical practice management expert and "got really good at helping docs make more money."

Then he began to weigh the rising costs of health care against reduced patient health. And he wanted to change that.

"We're relatively small, but what we're doing is gigantic," Greene said. "We intend to reform all health care with this tool."

Through a proprietary Internet-based computer program that works with any type of health insurance, doctors and patients are given financial incentives to improve communication. Doctors prescribe evidence-based "information therapy" to inform patients about their medical condition and what they can do to improve it. The Web site tracks



MEDENCENTIVE CEO

Jeff Greene:
"We're relatively small, but what we're going is gigantic. We intend to reform all health care with this tool."

when the patient reads the medical information. By doing this, doctors get higher reimbursements and patients get their copayments back.

"A medically literate, empowered and compliant patient consumes less health-care resources," Greene said, adding that that means less cost for employers who that wrap MedEncentive into their benefits package.

It works because of the doctor-patient covenant, Greene said. Patients subconsciously want to please their doctors by being compliant and knowledgeable, and doctors don't want patients to think they are providing substandard care.

"It puts both the doctor and patient on the same wavelength," he said.

Several Oklahoma companies, such as Integris Health and Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group, have adopted the program, along with several out-of-state companies.

"Our employees are thoroughly engaged," said Derek Williams, benefits manager for Dollar Thrifty, which started using MedEncentive for Oklahoma employees in March. "We've received a lot of positive comments."

The company might roll out the program to its 7,500 employees nationwide if it proves successful.

"If you have a house, you might put thousands of dollars into landscaping, put in hardwood floors and other things," Williams said. "But your health is an asset of far greater value than your home. You must maintain your health. This is another tool to help employees do that."