



# Employers and hospitals *Partnering* for better care



## GUNDERSEN HEALTH SYSTEM AND ASHLEY *IMPROVING HEALTH, REDUCING COSTS*

*Wisconsin hospitals and health systems share a common mission to improve access to care. That is why they are forming partnerships with local employers to develop onsite services, making it easier for employees to meet with a physician, nurse or wellness coach. These partnerships are helping employers hold the line on health care costs, prevent workplace injuries and reduce worker's compensation costs. All while creating a healthier community and with that, a healthier Wisconsin.*

*Over the next few weeks, the Wisconsin Hospital Association will share a series of articles that illustrate the innovative and effective programs that are being created in our state that are keeping employees, and their families, healthier.*

### **GUNDERSEN** HEALTH SYSTEM®

An on-site clinic at Ashley furniture's headquarters in Arcadia is taking a unique approach to minimizing health care costs.

Gundersen Health System, an integrated health care organization serving counties in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, has been running the Ashley Wellness Center for about nine years.

"The clinic has been very successful," said Chuck Johnson, on the regional operations team for Gundersen Health System.

He says many Ashley employees and their families go to the on-site center for most of their care, which can cover things like simple illness, injuries, treatment for hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol, as well as work-related care. It has a full lab with X-ray capabilities, and massages are being added soon.

The clinic is open about 60 hours a week, and is run by a staff of 20. All full- or part-time Ashley employees can access its services, and so can family members on the Ashley insurance plan. Some services are free, but most require a \$10 co-pay.

"We see people coming in for care they wouldn't otherwise get. It works to the patients' advantage, but also to the company's advantage," said Johnson.



To set fees, Gundersen estimates the cost to provide services based on utilization estimates for operational expenses. This is used to establish a fixed service fee for running the clinic.

That means the busier the clinic is, the more the company saves on the care delivered.

"There's no question it reduces the cost of care for the patients we serve," Johnson said. "It's really about getting as many people as possible using it. As use goes up, the cost per unit of visit goes down... There are certainly financial benefits to having a worksite clinic, but they have to be utilized."

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And utilized they were, Johnson said, as employees were quick to get onboard with the idea. That high early adoption rate led to several stages of expansion in the last few years, he added.

The clinic was recently relocated to a new facility which is larger than its previous space. It has more health care providers than when it started, more nurses, more physical therapists -- all with a goal of expanding services for Ashley employees.

"In pretty much every category, we have more staff," Johnson said.

Dr. Craig Bennett, a primary care physician, was brought on about three years ago. He performs prenatal and pediatric care at the clinic, which Johnson says brings "a whole new element to the service -- and it adds excitement for employees and clinic staff to see newborns coming in."

Brian Gilberts, media relations specialist for Gundersen, says the organization aims to expand on the clinic's offerings even more in the future, as doing so "lines up nicely" with Gundersen's strategic goals: providing a higher level of service and striving for lower cost of care, all while serving the community.

This program's success can at least partially be chalked up to locality, Johnson added, as much of Ashley's substantial workforce lives only a short drive from the clinic.

"We believe if the local system is committed to doing it well, and has the patients' best interests in mind, there's no way to do it better," he said.

*This profile appears in the Wisconsin Technology Council's recent publication, "Taking the Pulse - How Quality Healthcare Builds a Better Bottom Line." See the Tech Council publication here: <http://wisconsintechcouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Taking-the-Pulse-Healthcare-Quality-Report.pdf>*

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