



# Employers and hospitals *Partnering* for better care



## MAYO CLINIC/UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE/ EAU CLAIRE POLICE DEPARTMENT *REDUCING BACK INJURIES – LOWERING HEALTH CARE 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 being created in our state that are keeping employees, and their families, healthier.*



Back injuries and injuries tied to over exertion are among the most common workplace maladies. They're also a leading source of worker's compensation claims, which costs employers and workers alike in terms of pain, money and productivity.

A partnership between the Mayo Clinic, the UW-Eau Claire and the Eau Claire Police Department could lead to reduced back injuries for officers, research opportunities for the university and its students, and reduced worker's compensation costs for the clinic and the police department.

At a recent meeting of the WiSys Technology Foundation Board in Eau Claire, the partnership—which has already broadened into other areas, such as research into kidney disease—was described by Chancellor Jim Schmidt, Mayo Regional Executive Jason Craig and a mix of faculty, students and community leaders.

It is one of only two Universal Research Agreements fostered by Mayo in the United States—Arizona State University is the other—and it's designed to create a "triple bottom line" for the clinic, the university and the larger Eau Claire and northwest Wisconsin communities.

"Partnerships start with relationships," Schmidt said, and UW-Eau Claire's relationship with Mayo has reached into many aspects of the university, from its faculty researchers to the undergraduate students who carry it out and into campus projects tied to student and community health.





Craig, who is vice chair of operations for Mayo in northwest Wisconsin, said he expects the partnership to enhance the clinic's ability to marry research, education and practice. The clinic has five hospitals and 4,000 employees in northwest Wisconsin alone.

"Our product is research," Craig said, and improving that product helps improve clinical practice.

The police department project involves designing and testing a duty vest to replace duty belts, which carry a variety of equipment used by front-line officers. The weight and positioning of those belts can cause injuries over time. In fact, 16 percent of total worker's compensation claims nationally are related to lower back pain.

The vest being tested in Eau Claire seeks to redistribute weight without sacrificing the variety and accessibility of equipment used by officers. UW-Eau Claire's department of kinesiology is leading that effort. Another project involves identifying biomarkers for human polycystic kidney disease, a genetic disorder that can affect people at all stages of life and for which there is no current federally approved cure.

Mayo Clinic has been a leader in trying to uncover treatments and will work with researchers and students in UW-Eau Claire's biology department. Mayo is also heavily involved in campus plans for the \$50 million Sonnentag Center, which will be part sports arena and part student recreation center, as well as a home for the local YMCA. Mayo's Craig said he expects to see on-site research projects that speed the transfer of research to clinical practice, a timeline that traditionally is measured in decades.

"We hope this can help shorten the time between discovery to transfer," Craig said.

For Schmidt, another benefit of the Mayo agreement is slashing red tape. Because the legal implications of the agreement have already been worked out, there will be fewer barriers to clear for UW-Eau Claire researchers and students in working with Mayo.

There's also a tangible benefit for students. Schmidt said UW-Eau Claire wants each student to have at least two "high-impact experiences" outside the classroom before graduating. That may include research, study abroad, internships or community service. The Mayo pact offers possibilities for those kinds of experiences, he said.

Molly Svoboda, a student in UW-Eau Claire's biology department, said her work on human polycystic kidney disease is already broadening her student experience.

"I'm learning how to network within a scientific community of researchers and clinicians. Where else can I do that?" she 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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