

Rapides companies open health-care clinic for employees, dependents

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Roy Martin talks about the benefits of the new Central Louisiana Family Health and Wellness Center. The private clinic is for the employees and dependents of Martin Companies and Gilchrist Construction Co. Leandro Huebner/lhuebner@thetowntalk.com

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Two locally based companies unveiled what they think will become a model for employee health care Thursday.

Central Louisiana Family Health and Wellness Center opened last month on North Boulevard in Alexandria and had its grand opening ceremony Thursday. The clinic is a collaborative effort between Martin Companies and Gilchrist Construction Co.

It is based on the patient-centered medical home model, which promises more available, effective and efficient care.

"The reason this is a model is it's a collaborative," said Ray Peters, vice president of human resources for Martin Companies. "We had to work together to make it work."

"This is an opportunity for better overall health and wellness for our employees and their dependents," said Valerie Aymond, vice president of human resources for Gilchrist Construction. "We look at this as an employee benefit."

While there are other patient-centered medical homes in Louisiana, Peters said this one is unique because it's the first such clinic in the state that's a partnership between

employers.

Several large corporations, such as IBM, use the patient-centered medical home model. Together, Martin Companies and Gilchrist Construction have about 2,000 employees.

The concept rests on the idea that many employees and their families are not receiving the most efficient health care.

They may not have a primary-care physician. If they do, they may have a hard time getting in to see the doctor, or have a hard time making appointments because of work commitments. They may only see a medical professional when there's a problem -- sometimes ending up unnecessarily in the emergency room -- rather than focusing on preventive care.

The results, say employers, are less-productive employees and higher health-care costs.

"This kind of collaborative effort between companies is happening all over the country," said Roy Martin, president and chief financial officer of Martin Companies. "We think this is the way to bring health care efficiently and effectively to everyone in the nation."

"This is a great idea," said U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman. "Where we stand today is the best example I have seen of what private industry can do in spite of government."

The clinic is administered by First Onsite, a subsidiary of Hospital Corporation of America, parent company of Rapides Regional Medical Center.

Key to the model the clinic is using is "care management," meaning that the system would provide employees and their dependents better access to care and replace episodic or reactive care with long-term overall health and wellness treatment. Personalized care and frequent follow-up are hallmarks of the model.

"This model works," Peters said. "At the end of the day, they're happier and healthier, and we're happier as an

employer."