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South Charleston clinic will serve union members

by Lori Kersey, Weekend Editor



CHRIS DORST | Gazette-Mail photos

Kellie Shamblin, vice president of the Teamsters local 175 and a liaison for the Employer-Teamster Local nos. 175 & 505 Health and Welfare Fund (left) and physician assistant Kris Musick, right, stand in what will be the waiting room for the center, set to open this week in South Charleston. The health center, which is open to members of the Employer-Teamster Local nos. 175 & 505 Health and Welfare Fund, will be among the first in the state dedicated to

union members, officials say.

Dr. Chad Turner will be seeing patients at the new Union Health and Wellness Center opening in South Charleston across from Thomas Hospital.

Members of the Teamsters union will have a new option for primary care at no out-of-pocket expense to them beginning soon. Union officials hope the clinic will ultimately help them save money on health care costs.

The Union Health and Wellness Center at 428 Division Street in South Charleston will have a soft opening this week before its official opening March 21 and ribbon-cutting ceremony April 9.

The center will be the first or among the first in the state dedicated to serving members of a specific union, said Ken Hall, president of Teamsters Local 175.

The center will offer primary care, some generic prescription medications and lab work to members of the Employer-Teamster Local nos. 175 & 505 Health and Welfare Fund.

“Under the traditional insurance model, [patients] have copays, they have deductibles, there are out-of-pocket costs that they have to meet,” said Frank Litton, chairman of the board for the Health and Wellness Fund. “Under this business model, they have none of that. They walk in, they get treated and if they need generic medications that are within the pharmacy, they walk out with them.”

Activate has clinics with this model that serve other unions and employers in other states, but this is its first venture into West Virginia, said Robert Mandel, president of the eastern region for Activate.



Dr. Chad Turner, a primary care physician, and Kris Musick, a physician assistant, will offer primary care at the clinic. Musick and Turner, both West Virginia residents and natives, are working for Indianapolis, Indiana-based Activate Healthcare, which will run the clinic.

Comprehensive primary care is a cost savings to employers and unions because it helps prevent emergency room visits and hospitalizations —

which costs quite a bit of money, Mandel said. Activate health centers typically help groups save 15 to 20 percent of their medical costs within the first 12 to 18 months, he said. Plus, the clinics offer patients better care, he said.

The Health and Wellness Fund, with is separate entity from the union and the employer, works much like an insurance company does, Hall said. Every three or four years the Teamsters union negotiates contracts with employers. Part of those negotiations include the amount that each employer will contribute to the fund.

“Once they do that, the money is held in a trust for members and as members go to doctors, we pay those claims much like an insurance company except we’re self-insured,” Hall said.

The Teamsters union represents workers from 70-80 companies across the state, he said. They’re in diverse fields such as UPS workers, freight companies, dairies, beer distributors and others, he said. About 1,200 members are in the fund currently, he said.

While care at the clinic will be free to members, they will not be required to go be treated there.

The clinic will have flexible hours — opening at 7 a.m. some days and staying open until 7 p.m. on others. It will also offer appointment times longer than the 15 minutes doctors’ offices typically offer, Musick and Turner said.

“A lot of times when you go to your physician’s office there are time constraints — several appointments ahead or behind you,” Musick said. “And by using the model that we’re going to use, we’ll spend an adequate amount of time with the patient.”

There’s no set amount of time for appointments, Musick and Turner said.

“New patients might get an hour, follow-up visits might be a half hour to 45 minutes,” Turner said. “So the schedule will reflect that so that an adequate amount of time is able to be spent with each patient.”

Offering good primary and acute care can help patients better manage their health conditions, Litton said.

“Our population reflects that of a lot of the West Virginia population, and we have metabolic disorders like diabetes and high blood pressure and a lot of disease states,” Litton said. “Dr. Turner and Kris can work with them educate them, help them understand how better to manage their condition so that they don’t get the complications, they don’t get the foot amputated, they don’t have all the things that can flow from failure to manage their disease.

“Our focus on the fund is to try and get the best quality health care at the lowest cost to the participants for their long-term health and wellness,” he said.

While the clinic will be open to Teamsters members in the health fund now, if it’s successful,

officials hope to open it to other unions in the state, Hall said. They also hope that other Teamsters members not in the fund will join.

“I am pretty optimistic this is going to be very, very successful,” Hall said.

To reach the health center, call 304-768-0321 or see its website at activatehealthcare.com/unionhealthandwellnesscenter

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