

Partners in Care targets industries with uninsured jobs

People's Health Clinic starts new fundraising program to offset need from foundations and charities

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Of the Record staff

In a year when so many non-profit organizations are struggling to find money to fund their services, activities and foundations, the People's Health Clinic has a unique dilemma: granting organizations are struggling to find a reason to give money to a non-profit organization that significantly helps for-profit businesses.

PHC offers help directly to individuals and families in Summit and Wasatch counties who are uninsured and need medical help. Many of their patients work in the local service industry or the construction trades, earning erratic wages at part-time, seasonal or even full-time jobs that do not offer health insurance.

As the granting agencies see it, providing low-cost health care allows business owners to reduce costs, and perhaps enhance profits, by not offering health insurance.

Although that may be true, it's a matter of philosophy, counters Donna McAleer, PHC's executive director.

"We can sit back and do nothing about [uninsured workers] and let the problem grow, or we can try to do something about it," she said.

But PHC has found a way for the business community, that needs and creates these uninsured employees, to help make medical access a little easier.

The clinic's new fundraising program, called the Partners in Caring program, specifically targets industries such as lodging, food service and construction.

The goal of the program is to give local employers a chance to contribute to the clinic at various levels, allowing employees access to medical services. The cost of the donation is significantly less than insuring employees, but businesses can reap the benefits of employees spending less time away from work due to illness.

"PHC fills a void that is needed," said Hans Fuegi, owner of the Grub Steak Restaurant.

Fuegi offers health insurance to his management staff, a move he said was necessary

years ago, to ensure hiring and retaining good employees. The cost to his business is high, he added, but he has seen that workers often feel health insurance is more important than a higher salary.

"I don't think I would have the staff I have without health insurance," he said.

He also offers a "cafeteria-style" plan to some hourly workers, but says that most do not participate in part because they feel they cannot afford it and in part because they don't feel it is necessary.

But, he says, as a small business owner, offering and paying for health insurance for all of his employees is not economically feasible. His share of the premiums have increased 20 to

30 percent over the past four years, a move not matched in his menu prices.

Still, employees of the Grub Steak are doing better than many Americans. According to PHC's McAleer, 85 percent of American workers were offered insurance through their employer 20 years ago; last year, the number dropped to 60 percent. In Summit and Wasatch counties, approximately 10,000 residents, or 20 percent of the population, do not have health insurance.

Other national organizations have documented benefits to businesses when their employees are healthy. According to the Employee Benefit Research Institute, most small businesses surveyed said that offering health insurance helps with employee recruitment and retention and increases productivity. On an altruistic side, three-quarters of those surveyed said it was "the

right thing to do."

By offering health insurance, which translates into offering access to medical care, EBRI found that small business owners noticed a positive impact on their employees' attitudes, performance, health status and the overall success of the business.

The small businesses that did not offer health insurance/access to medical care did not report a perceived negative impact on their business. The survey showed, however,

that employee turnover was higher and employees stayed for a shorter amount of time at those companies.

The need for medical services for locals is well-documented: PHC sees almost 2,000 patients each year and more than 80 percent have jobs. The lodging industry employs 32 percent of those patients and the restaurant industry adds another 21 per-

cent.

"The Partners in Caring program is a cost-effective way for local businesses to contribute to the health and well-being of employees," said McAleer.

The goal of the program is to help the clinic reduce its reliance on foundation and charitable giving. PHC's yearly operation costs reach more than \$300,000; McAleer hopes to raise \$60,000 through this program. Businesses can partner with the clinic at different levels: \$600 for a one-week partnership, \$1,200 for a one-month partnership and \$3,600 for a quarterly partnership.

Unlike former efforts that appealed to the altruistic side of individuals and businesses, a side which is repeatedly approached with the area's 133 non-profits, Partners in Care appeals to a business

owner's sense of accountability, responsibility and desire to influence their bottom line. It gives local small businesses a way to aid employees in health care access without the burden of health insurance premiums.

The clinic has already pulled back from its earlier fundraising efforts using eBay, said McAleer, continuing it on a more individual gifting level. That fundraiser raised \$5,000 for the clinic earlier this year.

McAleer has already approached the lodging and restaurant industries through meetings and a mass mailing. She has received positive feedback and financial support from many of the properties. Snow Flower Property Management, Premier Resorts/Deer Valley Lodging, Park City Transportation, All Resort Express, Identity Properties and R&R Management have all sponsored clinics in June and July. The Park City Area Lodging Association also matched contributions of their participating members.

PHC also received a pledge from Michael Orgera, owner of AO Specialty Chemicals, to donate five percent of his profits from sales of cleaning and laundry agent to Lodging Association members.

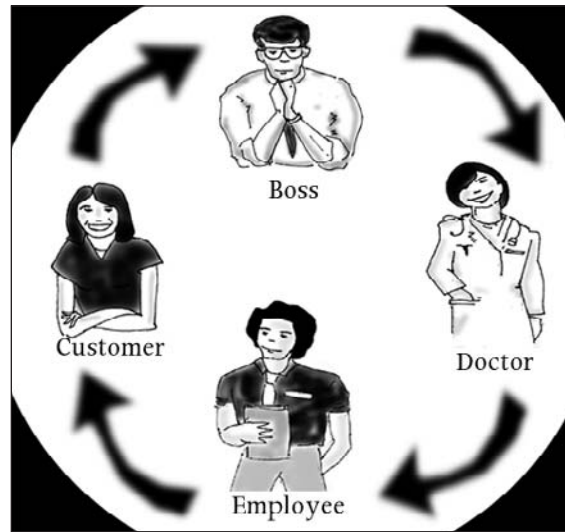
The restaurant community has been less responsive to date. So far, only the Grub Steak and the Park City Restaurant Association have contributed one-week partnerships.

McAleer's plans include approaching restaurateurs individually as well as contacting construction companies and retailers for future contributions.

The need for health care has increase especially during the hard economic times when companies are pulling back from their charitable donations as well as canceling health care coverage. With less access to medical care, the work force is sicker, delaying their visits to the doctor, living with prolonged illnesses and dying at younger ages, according to McAleer. This, in turn, affects the productivity of employees and profitability of companies.

PHC, with the help of the new program, hopes to lessen that impact.

For more information, contact Donna McAleer at the People's Health Clinic (435) 615-7822 or log on to www.peopleshealth-clinic.org.



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