

Solving health care challenges: 'The Dr. Will See You Now'

By **MARTY MULCAHY**
MADISON HEIGHTS, Mich. (PAI)
—The doctor is in ... at the union hall. Plumbers Local 98 has joined those

forward-thinking building trades unions on the cutting edge that take control of their healthcare challenges. As part of Local 98's benefit package, covered members now have their own medical clinic sponsored by the Plumbers Local 98 Insurance Fund: The Activate Health and Wellness Center, in Madison

Heights, Mich.

The clinic offers medical checkups, blood work and prescription drug therapy, as well as any treatments that most doctor's offices would handle. Clinic doctors and staff also offer one-on-one coaching to help their members deal with life's challenges, like stress reduction, smoking cessation, and weight loss. The new Local 98 clinic is located upstairs in what was formerly empty space above the local's union hall.

On staff at the Activate Health and Wellness Center are Dr. Audley Williams, two medical assistants and a physician's assistant health coach.

"This concept has been talked about for a while," said Local 98 Business Manager Carlo Castiglione. "But Obamacare really opened the floodgates. There have been concerns now and in the future about access to health care, whether there are enough doctors, and will they take our insurance? So we decided to take a look at this set-up, and we really think it's going to be a great, cost-effective benefit to our membership."

The new clinic hosted an open house in July. Local 98 active and retired members and families currently covered under the union insurance plan can use the facility to get their general medical needs taken care of — with no out-of-pocket costs and with no co-pays.

Castiglione said in an environment where health care costs increase 12 percent to 20 percent every year, the clinic is expected to be a financial benefit to the Local 98 fund's health costs.

"With right-to-work here in Michigan, this is an example of what your union can do for you," Castiglione added.

"We understand it's a new concept, and people might not want to get rid of their doctor. They don't have to. But for people like new apprentices, or members who don't have a family doctor, this is the kind of thing that can work from cradle to grave. And with no out-of-pocket costs, we anticipate that even those who currently have a family doctor will give it a try."

Activate Health Care, in conjunction with its sales partner, Old National Insurance, administer the program. Steve Gillie and Chris Perkins, account executives with Old National, were on hand at the open house. Gillie said to his knowledge, Local 98's clinic is the first of its type in Michigan, although there are some others in the U.S.

"This is really about improving ac-

AT THE UNION HALL

cess to primary care," Gillie said. "Statistically, we see that 60 percent to 70 percent of Americans do not have primary care doctors. Many people say the U.S. has a sickness-based or (an) urgent care-based health care system. This is a wellness-based system; our goal is to prevent sickness.

"This is also about treating the total person. This clinic will be a tremendous benefit by providing to the workingman a concierge-level of care with a great medical team. And for the health care plan, it's going to help combat future cost increases by encouraging people to get annual physicals and treat chronic illnesses early on."

The clinic's Dr. Williams is a Toronto native and graduate of the Loma Linda School of Medicine in California. He specializes in family medicine and disease prevention.

"We have a burdened health care system, with employers struggling to pay and patients not always having access to the best care," he said. "This is an innovative form of health care. Here the patients will have more time with their doctor, and their doctor will have more time to focus on preventative health care. It's really a great concept."

Physician assistant Debra Schmelzer and medical assistants Leigh Ann Lough and Rick Achilli are working with Dr. Williams at the clinic.

Castiglione said depending on how the concept catches on within Local 98 and with other union funds as possible partners, the clinic above Local 98 is potentially just a start. More medical offices could open, bringing health care closer to Local 98ers.

"What greater way to take care of our own and tell the nonunion that they should be in the labor movement? Now we have our own doctor!" Castiglione said.

(Editor's Note: Marty Mulcahy is editor of the The Building Tradesman in Madison Heights, Michigan.)



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