

FOCUS

Rockwell's telehealth trial bodes well

By Adam Moore
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Corridor companies looking for a case study in offering affordable, onsite health care may want to study the lessons of the region's largest private employer.

A new telehealth clinic at Rockwell Collins' main campus in Cedar Rapids has improved productivity, reduced costs and won over employees in its first year of operation, according to Laura Patterson, vice president of global total rewards and labor relations, making it a model for future expansions to other corporate sites.

The clinic at 5070 Rockwell Dr. NE opened last April in a partnership with MercyCare Community Physicians, and is one of only a few such facilities in the nation offering onsite telehealth technology to provide care to employees and their dependents. Patients can use the clinic to connect with select MercyCare providers over the Internet, allowing them to diagnose and treat minor health conditions such as infections, rashes and the flu via audio and video feeds.

Early surveys have revealed sizable time and cost savings for clinic users, Ms.

Patterson said. Employees report a visit to the telehealth clinic taking a third of the time of a normal doctor's visit – a figure that factors in travel, waiting for the provider, and so on – and cost savings of 30-40 percent when working with the compa-

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- Laura Patterson, vice president of global total rewards and labor relations with Rockwell Collins

ny's onsite pharmacy, she said. That's due in part to a new contract with pharmacy provider OptumRx guaranteeing the lowest retail drug prices onsite.

“Our employees know they don't have to go anywhere else, that they're going to get the lowest cost,” Ms. Patterson said.

“Because we have high-deductible health plans, they're very concerned about what the cost is, because they're paying that first dollar.”

Employees' overall experiences with the clinic have also been positive, Ms. Pat-



most other doctors.”

“The response has been, frankly, much better than I thought it would be,” Ms. Patterson added.

Visit numbers for the clinic's first year of operation weren't yet available, but its usage levels have increased. Rockwell added lab services to its offerings last fall in response to employee requests, and the clinic saw a 54 percent increase in visits in January as cold and flu season peaked, Ms. Patterson said.

Union employees at the company have also begun asking for access to the clinic, which is unavailable for the time being due to claim processing issues with their health insurance vendor. Claims from non-union employees are processed by Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, which worked with Rockwell and MercyCare prior to the clinic's opening to navigate various state regulations governing telehealth reimbursements.

The program's success has Rockwell officials planning to offer telehealth clinics at other sites in the U.S. The company's Melbourne, Florida, campus will likely be the next recipient, Ms. Patterson said, with its 1,700 employees making it Rockwell's second-largest site. CBJ

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