



Posted on Thu, May. 22, 2008

Coalition on health care moves forward

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The Wichita Business Coalition on Health Care is official.

A founding group of employers, health care providers and insurance professionals this week approved its incorporating bylaws and elected a board of directors.

The coalition seeks to address health care costs by collaborating on issues that affect the Wichita region, particularly from the perspective of employers, the primary purchasers of health care.

"We're really excited about the opportunity to address this issue with all the players at the table," said new board member Matthew Mount, controller for Wescon Products Co.

"There is no silver bullet, (but) it's going to be an organization where all the groups have a say and the ability to tackle the issue from every side. That's probably the most exciting part."

The new board, which plans to expand from five to around 20 members, also includes chairman Dan Dymarkowski of Hawker Beechcraft Corp., vice chairman Jon Rosell of the Medical Society of Sedgwick County, secretary-treasurer Gary Hardman of Hardman Benefit Plans and **Anita Bourke from IMA of Kansas.**

The founding members also approved the group's strategic plan, which aims to affect health care cost and quality in Wichita through a series of initiatives that embrace collaboration, utilization, transparency, benefit design and risk reduction.

Dymarkowski, who said he was skeptical that such a coalition could work, is now convinced it can make a difference.

Initially, "I felt a lot of tension in the air -- we had employers, representatives from major hospitals, doctors groups, specialty hospitals, insurance companies," he said. "It kind of solidified my thoughts that... I'm here to protect my turf, to yell and scream that we as an employer are not happy.

But after several meetings, he said he now recognizes that each side has legitimate concerns and that while Wichita's medical delivery system is a good one, it has room for improvement -- from all sides.

"I don't know where we'll be in a year or two," he said. "But if nothing else, we're getting in the room with people who can make and recommend changes, and I think that's the foundation of this organization."

The board approved removing the interim designation from executive director Ron Whiting and will be negotiating his contract.

The group's next meeting is a kickoff event of sorts next week that that will feature Andrew Webber, president and chief executive of the National Business Coalition on Health.

Jim Walters, senior vice president for human resources at Cessna Aircraft, is a featured speaker as well.

Whiting said he hopes to attract more employers to the membership-driven coalition.

"The more organizations that get involved, the more chance we'll have to tap into the important issues for employers and providers," he said.

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