

'Near-House' Healthcare

Executives bet that Alexandria Industries' company-owned clinic will produce healthier, happier employees and ultimately help contain the costs of health insurance.



Lynette Kluver, director of organizational development, and CEO Tom Schabel.

Alexandria Industries this fall opened a company-owned healthcare clinic that executives predict will simultaneously give employees convenient access to healthcare and also help the company shrink the ever-increasing costs of providing employee health insurance.

The 2,000-foot clinic, operated by a nurse practitioner, an LPN, and two support staff, provides the company's 500-plus Alexandria-based employees with

preventive services like physical exams, immunizations, well-baby checkups, and care for minor illnesses and injuries—all for free.

Convenience aside, the clinic's most potent impact will likely be how it helps reduce the effects of chronic disease on employees and on the associated costs of health insurance.

"The costliest impact to our self-funded health plan is managing chronic disease," said Lynette Kluver, the company's

innovative director of organizational development and architect of the idea.

Kluver, like other HR professionals, is fully aware of CDC estimates that 86 percent of all health care spending goes to people with one or more chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, type-2 diabetes, obesity, and arthritis—and that some of these conditions are largely preventable through changes in lifestyle.

Alexandria Industries first tackled worksite wellness ten years ago through a biometric program that helped employees understand and reduce health risks related to cholesterol, blood pressure, weight, and glucose.

Then, a couple years ago, Kluver and her team determined that a company-owned clinic could build upon their worksite wellness success.

"We already know what we're doing to make healthy lifestyle decisions. We know our risks as individuals and as an organization," Kluver said. "We opened the clinic to help figure out how to get healthy and stay healthy."

The formation of the clinic was guided by Achieve Wellness, a regional third-party workplace health and wellness provider based in Wisconsin that had been a decade-long worksite wellness consultant with Alexandria Industries. Achieve employees currently staff the clinic.

Kluver's confidence that the clinic will save the company money over the long term is predicated on employees using it. Therefore, the company spent time ensuring that the facility cultivated a warm and inviting atmosphere.

"When you walk in, it's almost like walking into my living room," Kluver said, adding that CEO Tom Schabel insisted he didn't want this to look or smell like a clinic.

They succeeded. The open reception area is illuminated with plenty of natural light. There are two spacious exam rooms, a lab, and a multi-purpose room.

Rather than calling it an “in-house” clinic, Kluver refers to it as a “near-house” clinic, emphasizing that its location is two blocks from Alexandria Industries’ main campus—close enough to be convenient but distant enough to ensure the confidentiality of employee health records.

“That was purposeful,” Kluver said. “We feel it gives more confidentiality to the employees than an in-house clinic. It’s real close, they could walk over there, yet they have privacy. Nobody sees anybody coming or going.”

The emphasis on confidentiality is reinforced by the fact that the clinic is operated by Achieve Wellness.

“We have no access,” Kluver said. “It’s a separate phone system and a separate computer system. Everything is separate. We make that very clear distinction: We own it, but we don’t operate it.”

The company sought to make early stakeholders of employees by posting construction updates from “demo to studs,”

Kluver said. “There was a lot of interest. I think because of our wellness program over the years, we’ve created some savvy health care consumers. I think overall, our employees and their families were ready for something else.”

Kluver stresses as well that the clinic is

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not a response to perceived inadequacies in the quality of local health.

“We’re very much pleased with the relationship and the services available in Douglas County and surrounding areas,” Kluver said, allowing that “there are some challenges to health care. When you

hear people talking about, I called for an appointment, and it takes so long for me to get in. I think we can be more responsive with our own clinic, more personalized.”

Alexandria Industries first approached the clinic as a two-company collaboration with cross-town Douglas Machine (which also recently launched its own company-owned clinic) because it gets complicated to merge company cultures. Kluver acknowledges that there is significant potential in multi-company collaborations, but admits difficulty to aligning everybody’s visions, goals, and outcomes.

“There are a lot of advantages of just working with one company and understanding that company’s specific culture, specific goals, and specific atmosphere,” Kluver said.

The new clinic has already attracted attention and visits from other companies that are looking for more cost effective delivery of healthcare and more personalized delivery. ■

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