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Enterprise Story
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Uninsured people in Utah will soon have a convenient way of getting medical care without going to a doctors office or hospital – they can just go to Smith’s supermarkets.

This trend of one-stop shopping started by adding household items, pharmacies, and even banks to grocery stores. Now there is medical care.

In a joint venture with Intermountain Healthcare, Smith’s supermarkets are now offering ExpressCare clinics at select locations. The first location opened April 12, 2006, at a Smith’s in the Millcreek area of Salt Lake City. The next clinic is scheduled to open in May in the Farmington Smith’s.

The clinics will be staffed by nurse practitioners, who have a very well defined scope of practice that is strictly limited to family medicine. They expect to see patients of all ages, but none younger than two years old, said Ruth Palmer, RN, and developer of the Scope of Practice documents for Intermountain Healthcare. The Scope of Practice lists every allowed procedure as well as what qualifications and training must be completed.

“The nurse practitioners will do triage, emergency procedures, and infection control,” Palmer said. “They will have a consulting physician, in accordance with the Utah Nurse Practitioners Act, that is available by phone for consultation.”

Opening these clinics may seem unusual in a market that already has InstaCares, many medical clinics, and several hospitals. But the target clientele for these clinics are uninsured people who may not get medical care otherwise. Intermountain’s objective is to encourage

people to get the care that they need, much like other “impulse items,” by putting these clinics in easily accessible places such as a supermarket.

“This type of clinic is being opened in other markets around the country,” said Linda Leckman, CEO of Intermountain Healthcare’s Medical Group. “If we don’t open them, one of our competitors will.”

The nurse practitioners in the clinics will treat and diagnose a carefully defined list of ailments. Anything not on the list will be referred to a primary care physician, an InstaCare, or an emergency room. The cost for a visit will be \$35 with an additional charge for any tests run.

Some local physicians, afraid that the clinics would take patients away from their practices, expressed fear and concern about the clinics when they were first proposed.

“If the clinic is so accessible in the grocery store, why would patients come in to see their primary care physician?” asked Dr. Anne Pendo an internal medicine doctor at LDS Hospital.

After receiving more information on the scope of practice for the clinic, Pendo said that she was now more comfortable that the clinics will not be competition for her clinic but might serve a population that is not being reached.

“There has been terrific response from the Board (of Directors) and the community,” said Tim Hatch, director of strategic planning for Intermountain Healthcare. “Primary care physicians might view this as competing against them, but thus far there has not been a lot of concern.”

One possible concern is that the presence of a clinic in a grocery store may draw sick people to come in for care, Hatch said.

“But we understand there is nothing that keeps sick people from the grocery store,” said Hatch. “They go to the pharmacy or to get food. They might as well get medical care in the same stop.”

Each clinic will have a front desk as well as offer a private consultation room. Supplies will be limited – there will be no narcotics stored on site. The nurse practitioner at each location will have the ability to run several simple tests such as the “quick” strep test and will have the appropriate licenses to prescribe medications.

If the clinics are successful, Intermountain and Smith’s may expand them to other locations.

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References:

Ruth Palmer, RN 442-3143 Intermountain Healthcare Central Office

Tim Hatch, 442-3035, Director of Strategic Planning, Intermountain Healthcare Central Office

Linda Leckman, MD, 442-2000, CEO Intermountain Medical Group

Anne Pendo, MD, 408-2888, Internal Medicine practitioner at LDS Hospital