

Healthy partnership

By Louise Brass For The Sun May 10, 2011 4:16PM

Edward Hospital and DuPage Medical Group announced a joint venture Tuesday afternoon, calling the move a "ground-breaking" initiative to improve the quality, access and efficiency of health care in the region.

The two entities have created the Illinois Health Partners (IHP), with an emphasis on jointly managing the care of nearly 100,000 HMO patients in the western and southwestern suburbs.

"The vision is to really deliver increased quality to all of our patients. We will be connected in a way that we haven't been before. All patients will receive the benefits of this venture immediately," said Mark Kasper, CEO of DuPage Medical Group.

The planned, seamless sharing of electronic data between the two entities will mean a cost savings, said Pam Davis, Edward Health Services CEO, during the press conference.

"Edward Hospital has had a long tradition of doing joint ventures with our physicians. We are a very physician- and patient-oriented organization. It was actually a natural extension for us to partner with this phenomenal 300 multi-specialty, independent group of physicians," Davis said.

Current and new patients will have better access to primary care physicians, she said. "With health care reform, we are going to see a big influx of patients," Davis said.

The communities served by DMG and Edward Health Services include 1.7 million Illinois residents in Kane, DuPage Will and Kendall counties.

No bricks and mortar projects will be necessary, however, Edward is now at full occupancy. "We are actually looking at possible expansion on the hospital campus," Davis said.

IHP will initially focus on HMO populations of both organizations. However the project will extend beyond HMO patients as the two entities work closely to develop clinical initiatives, and develop contracts with insurance carriers, to enhance coordination of care.

Davis and Kasper will initially co-chair the eight-member IHP board. Four members will be selected by each organization, while the two entities will keep their individual identities separate, Davis said.

DuPage Medical Group is affiliated with other organizations, however this new arrangement should not affect them, Kasper said.

"This relationship will be focused on improving quality, efficiency and access to care for our patients — with physicians driving the process. We chose Edward as our partner because of its excellent quality, strong reputation and long history of partnering with physicians," Kasper said.

The collaboration will include an IT interface connection, creating the ability to take fragmentation out of service the system, by the sharing of electronic medical record data, for all patients, he said.

Kasper referred to DMP the strongest independent medical group in the state. DMP has more than 320 doctor members, and Edward has more than 80.

"We are really excited to be joining one of the most prestigious hospitals in the area. This means high-quality, cost-effective health care with expanded patient access and better patient outcomes. This will be a transformational type of change for the system," Kasper said.

Edward was named the 2010 number one most preferred hospital in the region by the National Research Corp. "The joint venture is a community-based solution to the challenges of continuing to improve the quality of health care in this region. Collaborating with DMG group is a natural for us since we know that physicians who practice in our service area are our best partners in this work," she said.

More physicians are expected to join the venture as the area continues to grow, Davis said.

The venture did not require the approval of the Illinois Health Planning Board, as did Edward's proposal to build a new hospital in Plainfield. That proposal is still on Edward's radar. "We are very committed to the growth of our Plainfield campus," Davis said.