



To Your Health

At the First Responders Partnership Health Center, quality care for PBA members will be on the rise to make them healthy, worthy and wise

The First Responder Partnership Health Center will be equipped with a lab so users can get blood draws on the spot, like the one Integrity Health Chief Clinical Officer Judy Lagana is setting up here for Somerset County Correction Officers Local 177 member Tim Norton.

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

■ PHOTOS BY JIM CONNOLLY

Walking into the waiting room of a primary health center like the one Integrity Health is building exclusively for first responders that will debut in 2020 seems too good to be true because, well, there's no wait. All care here is urgent.

Before even entering the treatment area, users see the pharmacy where they can get prescriptions filled on the way out. Go through the first door on the way to primary care and notice the lab that can process just about any type of diagnostic on the spot. Whoa, there's also an X-ray room. And a place to get mental healthcare. And a gym with physical therapy equipment, physical therapists on staff and adjacent rooms for a chiropractor or acupuncture. If

you need a mole removed, you can get it done here, too.

Perusing the First Responders Partnership Health Center (FRPHC) can be like viewing that mansion at the end of the block that has just been put up for sale. You never imagined it had that many bathrooms. And a home theater. And a deck with a spa.

The FRPHC combines the layout of a shopping mall – Short Hills-style – with a touch of Disney World. But no lines. Prompted by the NJ State PBA – especially State Corrections Local 105 – the FMBA, the State Troopers Fraternal Association, the State Troopers NCO Association and the State Troopers Superior Officers Association, the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits has approved Integrity Health to open primary care centers for first responders and their families.



Integrity Health Chair and CEO Doug Forrester, center, discusses the setup for the First Responder Partnership Health Center with NJ State PBA Executive Vice President Marc Kovar, left, and President Pat Colligan.

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The first such wonderland will premiere in Hamilton Township near “The Rock,” probably in April. With a focus on wellness rather than treatment, Integrity Health Chair and Chief Executive Officer Doug Forrester promises the FRPHC will be a home base for PBA members to finally get the quality of care they have been paying for since the onslaught of Chapter 78.

Open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week, the FRPHC truly will be a one-stop shop for all things healthcare, including offering a robust network of specialists to support cutting-edge primary care. Yes, members will need to see the FRPHC to believe it, but it’s apparently such an ahead-of-its-time innovation that they are asking when others will be built. (A second one located in Bergen County is already in discussion.)

“This will revolutionize healthcare,” extols Kevin Lyons, the PBA’s health benefits coordinator who sits on the State Health Benefits Design Committee and can analyze this topic with more expertise than Cris Collinsworth breaking down an NFL game.

“I don’t use the term ‘revolutionize’ lightly,” Lyons continues. “When you come into this profession, you come in for life, and we want people to have long and healthy careers and long and healthy retirements. The partnership health center will give all members and their families the security to know that if any problem comes up, they are going to have the resources to properly treat it. And the resources to hopefully prevent it.”

Feeling your pain

Healthcare is a matter of pain. Pain management is the sin-

gle largest area of spend in any health insurance plan.

No profession seems to experience more pain than law enforcement, both physical and mental. Think about all the money that is spent on treatment of pain just with physical therapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, orthopedic, musculoskeletal intervention and pharmaceuticals.

“Big, big numbers and the problem is that patients in pain get passed around like candy,” Forrester explains. “We have to assess what is not acceptable, debilitating, distracting and deceptive and cut it off at the pass.”

Another, equally debilitating source of pain comes from the agony of actually scheduling care and getting it delivered. With minimal hassles. So you say you want a revolution that leads to same-day appointments, seeing a doctor for more than five minutes, split-second diagnostics and reliable follow up. Allow Lyons and Forrester a few moments on well-researched soapboxes to detail how the FRPHC not only feels your pain but has a concept that can do something about it.

“In the U.S., we spend more on healthcare than the next 10 developed countries combined,” Lyons reports. “It’s 20 percent of our gross domestic product, and that just can’t be sustained. And it’s not public employees who are bankrupting the system, it’s the system bankrupting the system. It’s almost like ‘Little Shop of Horrors,’ where you ‘feed me.’ Nobody works on a profit margin larger than a hospital. Like 400 percent. But a big-box retail store works on a 5-percent margin. That’s where we have to go.”

That’s where the FRPHC can take the system to place care above cost. Way above. As New Jersey’s director of pensions from 1984 to 1990, during which time he managed the state’s million-member health benefits plan, Forrester witnessed

how the system left first responders a husk of a woman or man at the end of their careers.

As Integrity Health chair, he has led the development of a partnership model that increases access to care and connects people to the best possible providers. Through the FRPHC, he is making a pledge to PBA members.

"Rather than having a healthcare system that puts a premium on how not to spend, we want to spend it on the front end on wellness care," Forrester educates. "You save money in a healthcare system by keeping people healthier. So instead of figuring how not to spend, we will have a system that saves money on the back end."

Forrester confides that he was inspired to this concept from one of America's first healthcare providers. Following the Ben Franklin philosophy of a penny saved being a penny earned and not being penny-wise and pound-foolish, he adds, "A penny spent early on in somebody's career is worth dollars down the road."

Plan ahead

In the PBA's never-ending effort to upgrade members' health benefits, the FRPHC became an obvious and welcome opportunity. Lyons had heard about the West Palm Beach, Florida Fire Department having a care facility for its employees. And PBA President Pat Colligan was a member of the Rutgers Community Health Plan (RCHP), which had a one-stop shop for care but a thin network of specialists.

"They went out of their way to make sure you would not go to the hospital," Colligan recalls. "That's not Doug's plan."

Doug's plan had manifested in partnership health centers for teachers in Toms River, Brick and Long Branch. Integrity Health also had opened a partnership health center for Som-



PBA President Pat Colligan, right, and Executive Vice President Marc Kovar check out some of the equipment that will be part of the physical therapy room at the First Responder Partnership Health Center.

erset County municipal employees in Somerville.

Lyons and Colligan led the push with the State Health Benefits Plan (SHBP) to pilot a first responders center in New Jersey. After Forrester presented his idea at a SHBP meeting, the PBA quickly received a call from the governor's office indicating the state was going to move on this.

"We know how slow Trenton moves, but the governor's of-

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The First Responders Partnership Health Center (FRPHC) is the most exciting health care news in many years for first responders!

FRPHC is a collaborative effort of the first responder union leadership and Integrity Health, a well-known, New Jersey-based firm specializing in managing health plans from a patient-centered medical home platform called "Partnership Health Center".

FRPHC Services will include:

**Same-day appointments • Doctor visits • Required Medical Exams/Physicals • X-ray • Lab work
Rx • Physical Therapy • Chiropractic • Pain Diagnostics • Behavioral Health • Care coordination
Disease Management • Wellness & Nutrition**

**These services will be available to you and your family,
at a convenient location, from 7 a.m.-7 p.m., 7 days a week - 7/7/7**

The FRPHC will provide customized care by specially trained providers to meet the medical needs of first responders, and will eliminate:

- Delays in getting doctor appointments
- Shift work interfering with appointments
- Trouble with specialist referrals and lack of care coordination among them
- Providers unfamiliar with the unique health challenges of law enforcement.

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fice saw the value in the unique needs of our members,” Colligan notes.

The PBA was attracted to the plan because of its convenience to members with an operation running 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week, or “7-7-7,” as it is affectionately known. With X-ray, PT, chiro, a pharmacy, etc., the FRPHC is like an urgent care facility on steroids that makes life easier for first responders and their demanding shift schedules. It’s also a model built on the expectations of the employee, not the employer.

“We really haven’t been able to find any issues when we did our vetting in any of the other facilities Integrity Health runs,” Colligan reasons. “One thing I like about Doug’s plan is that he really wants to affect the wellness of members to make sure they don’t need to use this facility.”

Primary decisions

Changing the healthcare model from treatment to wellness brings the FRPHC back to Ben Franklin. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so consequently the Integrity Health preemptive model puts the premium on primary care.

Members using the FRPHC will learn some very important lessons about the value of primary care. First and foremost, the centers are built on the premise that so many health problems can be corrected or prevented by being aggressive with primary care.

They will realize what they have perhaps suspected: that the system has evolved to create barriers to care, which drives up costs. Consider how that compels people to wait to the last minute to get treatment and maybe have to go to an ER, where the costs might be 10 times what somebody will pay for

primary care.

As a result, there is no waiting to the last minute or even waiting at the FRPHC. That’s because the plan uses a collaborative treatment effort, starting with primary care to keep users healthy, rather than treating them only when they are sick, as would be the case in the ER.

“Because of the importance of early care and care coordination, we are not just an add-on to the system,” Forrester submits. “We need to be responsible for followup. We need to integrate specialists. You have patients who are seeing 10 different doctors and taking 16 different medications. It’s not that we want to change the providers. All we are trying to do is make sure the doctors are talking to each other.”

Care coordination will also lead to addressing wellness as a combination of treating body and mind – treating the whole body. The FRPHC plan puts behavioral health into primary care as a robust way to reduce the stigma of getting mental healthcare.

Additionally, if you believe that the current landscape of law enforcing leads to much more depression, post-traumatic stress and suicidal thoughts than ever before, the FRPHC offers delivery of mental health and wellness for officers who are not sure where to go to get it. And get it when they need it most. From a wellness perspective, every officer needs counseling – or could benefit from it – and it’s always available here.

“The job is taking a toll on you, so you have earned this easy access of 7 to 7, seven days a week,” Forester emphasizes. “It’s not something that is available under any other circumstances I am aware of. We are here to work with first responders because of the unique consequences you encounter.”

In other words, they feel your pain at the FRPHC. So come April, it will be time to join the revolution.