

Idaho Statesman, Tuesday, March 9, 2010 -- by Colleen LaMay

Saint Al's starts building 4-hospital group

Meanwhile, a rural medical clinic is getting a new name and new specialists.

Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise is taking its first steps toward developing a system that will include clinics and hospitals in an area extending 150 miles west of the Treasure Valley.

On Monday, the hospital's parent organization, the massive nonprofit Trinity Health, took over management of the Dominican Health Services Clinic in Fruitland, adding new staff and preparing to provide specialty care. Saint Al's will add its name to the clinic.

Trinity Health and Saint Alphonsus are in the final stages of closing a deal to buy three hospitals spanning about 200 miles of southern Idaho and eastern Oregon. The hospitals are Mercy Medical Center in Nampa, Holy Rosary Medical Center in Ontario, Ore., and St. Elizabeth Health Services in Baker City, Ore.

The Fruitland clinic had been part of Holy Rosary. The only wrinkle so far involves the staff of the Fruitland medical clinic. Five physician's assistants who worked there resigned, as did the family physician, according to Tom Reinhardt, assistant president for physician network development at Saint Al's.

"They basically worked here for years," said Dr. Michael Roach, chief medical officer for Saint Alphonsus Medical Group. "They will be continuing to work, but it will be in a clinic across the street."

Roach said that clinic is being built by St. Luke's Hospital System, Saint Al's Boise competitor. Reinhardt said he didn't know why the physicians assistants and the doctor resigned. A St. Luke's spokesman said they approached St. Luke's for jobs, not the other way around. The six could not immediately be reached late Monday.

Saint Al's plans to enhance the community's access to specialists, including cardiologists and neurosurgeons who will see patients at the Saint Al's clinic, Reinhardt said. The clinic will be staffed with certified family nurse practitioners and a family physician. "We will have at least one physician on site all day," he said.

Patients still can use the clinic without appointments. Other enhancements will include:

- A new registration system that will make it quicker for patients to check in and access their medical records.
- Installation of a new billing system to make it easier for patients to understand their bills.
- New digital X-ray equipment.
- The ability for patients to schedule appointments as an alternative to walk-in appointments.