

**Lewiston Tribune, Saturday, May 16, 2009 – by Kathy Hedberg**

## **Two area hospitals take part in national project** *Cottonwood, Orofino selected for 'patient-centered medical homes'*

St. Mary's Hospital in Cottonwood and Clearwater Valley Hospital in Orofino have been selected to participate in a four-year, \$6 million national initiative to improve patient care and increase efficiency.

The initiative is aimed at transforming primary care clinics into "patient-centered medical homes."

The patient-centered medical home gathers all the services from various care providers a patient may be receiving and places them under the guidance of a single-family practice physician. The project is expected to reduce medical costs as well as improve services.

Pam McBride, the grants writer for the hospitals, said sometimes patients, especially those who are older or who have chronic diseases, may have to see a number of medical specialists for related conditions.

"You might see a cardiologist, an internist, a rheumatologist, and all the other 'ologists' and right now those people don't really talk to each other," McBride said. "Each of the 'ologists' might be prescribing a different drug for that little piece of the patient that they're looking at."

This lack of interaction between doctors, McBride said, can cause problems, especially if a patient can't remember all the drugs they're taking. The patient-centered medical home - which is a newly coined term - uses a primary care physician to coordinate all those various treatments, which could cut down on the number of tests people might need and their expenses.

The Idaho Primary Care Association was one of five health centers nationwide chosen for the initiative, which is funded through the Commonwealth Fund and Qualis Health, a Seattle-based quality improvement organization. The association will receive \$500,000 over a four-year period to work with 13 primary care clinics in Idaho to make the transition.

Health centers in Colorado, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts will be involved in the project.

The clinics will be given technical assistance, training and ongoing support to improve how they coordinate and deliver care to patients. The project also will incorporate the use of technology to improve patient care and clinic efficiency.

Jeanette Gorman, community relations coordinator for the hospitals, said the health centers will be able to share information and learn from one another. "There will be 68 clinic sites across the nation," she said. "I think that what we learn in one site we'll be sharing with the other sites, so that any good ideas that are generated, we'll have the opportunity to learn about those."

Another component of the initiative will be to look at the way medical services are being reimbursed.

"The way things are reimbursed right now," Gorman said, "there is an inequity that exists between family practice (physicians) versus specialist services. That's why we have fewer family practice physicians out there today, because by the time a medical student completes their training, they're thousands and thousands of dollars into debt and want to go into specialties to help pay off the debt."

McBride said the initiative will help find solutions to the nation's health crisis.

"Part of what's driving medical costs is the frequent use of specialists," McBride said. "That is not to say specialists don't provide good care - they do and they're useful. But when a patient is going to five or 10 different doctors, the specialists are getting paid a lot more for each visit than the family practice doc is.

"If you can have somebody at the center working with the patients, the family practice doc doesn't have all the specialized knowledge, but they know who they can call and get that knowledge.