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A deal for more doctors

Kootenai Health acquires North Idaho Medical Care centers

COEUR d'ALENE -- Kootenai Health will take over six North Idaho Medical Care centers this fall, which will allow the county's main medical provider to add primary care physicians to its team.

The Kootenai Hospital District board of trustees and the 13 owners of North Idaho Medical Care centers agreed that Kootenai Health will take over operation of the centers Oct. 1. The acquisition allows Kootenai Health to grow its physician base to meet community needs, officials said. It will improve access for all patients, including those with Medicare benefits, who want to establish a connection with a family practice physician.

"When we recognized the many benefits to our patients and our medical group that could be realized by partnering with a larger organization, we naturally looked to Kootenai Health," said Jack T. Riggs, M.D., founder of the North Idaho Medical Care centers. "They share our philosophy of providing excellent health care and have focused on community needs throughout this process."

The centers employ 113 people, including 23 physicians, and accounts for around 50,000 patient visits annually in Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls, Hayden, Rathdrum and Sandpoint. Started by Riggs in 1986, North Idaho Medical Care centers offer walk-in patient care as well as occupational, family, senior and sports medicine.

"This acquisition is consistent with our mission," said Joe Morris, chief executive officer of Kootenai Health. "Next year we anticipate that the family practices will become part of the Kootenai physician clinics, which will then total 37 physicians' practices."

The county is facing a future shortage of primary care physicians. The move is consistent with a trend toward a more integrated health service system, and ensures local ownership, which can be more responsive to community medical needs, Kootenai Health said in a press release.

"This will be a good move for our patients," said Kirk Hjeltness, M.D., CEO and medical director of North Idaho Medical Care. "The combined resources of our group and Kootenai Health will mean patients can continue to receive convenient, timely care close to where they live and work."

Morris anticipates that patients currently using the centers will notice little change initially. Locations, staffing, hours of operation and services provided are all expected to remain the same.

"Under the leadership of Riggs, North Idaho Medical Care has built a strong practice and a respected business over the past 22 years," Morris said. "North Idaho Medical Care Centers account for a significant percentage of the treatment patients receive in our community. We plan to continue and grow that tradition."