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by Treva Lind
Page 1 of 1

Ride to Care program expands into Spokane Valley

A pilot program for medical transportation has expanded to Spokane Valley.

Called Ride to Care, the program through SNAP was launched in January within the city of Spokane.

The program provides an option where patients who call 911 with less serious medical issues are offered a ride to an urgent care center instead of being taken by ambulance to the emergency room. Coverage in Spokane Valley was added Aug. 7.

Cameryn Flynn, Ride to Care medical transportation coordinator, said the program expanded because of interest from regional leaders and the program's success to date. It's still considered to be in pilot stage, but funding has been secured through Oct. 31, she said.

"It's good to launch a program in small components," Flynn said. "It went so well in the city."

The program in the city of Spokane is working with CHAS urgent care clinics as well as Providence Health & Services urgent care clinics, Flynn added.

CHAS has arranged to be the program's partner in Spokane Valley, she said.

"We're reducing costs for the overall health care system, specifically for the transportation," she said.

On some 911 calls for medical assistance, paramedics determine that the patient's condition is minor and doesn't require a trip to a hospital emergency room. Flynn said these types of calls can be handled more efficiently at an urgent care clinic with a follow-up ride.

The choice of going to an urgent care facility isn't required, and anyone who wants to go to the hospital in an ambulance can still do so. If a patient chooses Ride to Care, a SNAP-contracted vehicle is dispatched to transport them.

That ride also can include taking the patient to a pharmacy, if needed, before returning home. A program like Ride to Care was among the recommendations of Mayor David Condon's fire task force, which issued a final report in 2013.

SNAP has estimated the average patient will save \$300 to \$800 in health care costs by going to urgent care rather than the emergency room.

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