

MAHEC to manage Mission primary care practices

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Pictured are, from left, Jill Hoggard-Green, chief operating officer of Mission Health and president of Mission Hospital, Dr. Jeffery Heck, president and CEO of MAHEC and Dr. Ronald A. Paulus, president and CEO of Mission Health. / Special to the Citizen-Times

ASHEVILLE — Mountain Area Health Education Center will begin managing more than a dozen of Mission Medical Associates' primary care practices.

“We feel like the physicians that are practicing in the MMA practices are great providers. We don't want do anything other than enhance the care they are able to provide and not take away from anything that's already working well,” said Dr. Jeff Heck, MAHEC president and CEO.

Mission Health and MAHEC signed an agreement this week for MAHEC to begin managing Mission's practices. The 14 practices are across the region and include Mission's new My Care Plus clinics.

MAHEC is one of nine Area Health Education Centers across North Carolina. The organization trains doctors through its residency and fellowship programs that include family medicine, OB/GYN and general dentistry.

MAHEC also has several medical practices, including one at its main campus on Biltmore Avenue.

Jill Hoggard-Green, president of Mission Hospital and Mission Medical Associates, said Mission sought out MAHEC to manage its practices.

“We are committed to making sure there are great primary care clinicians, and in Mission Medical Associates, we have almost 100 primary care providers. So as we were looking at how do we assure they have the right support to meet all the needs of their patients, we looked at MAHEC and saw they had exquisite management skills,” Hoggard-Green said.

Heck said patients will continue to see their same doctors.

Prevention will be a focus in the practices, and patients may also have access to additional resources.

“Older patients that are on multiple medications may see a clinical pharmacist. People going through a challenging time in their life may be speaking to a behavioral medicine physician,” Heck said. “But I think the basic high quality of care and interaction that patients have with their providers, I don't think they'll see a major change.”

Many of the doctors at the Mission practices are MAHEC graduates.

Heck predicted demand for primary care will continue to grow as more people gain health coverage through the Affordable Care Act. “I think we’re definitely seeing a greater demand for primary care over the last two or three years,” he said. “I don’t think we’ve begun to see the number that we’re going to see.”

Mission has been actively increasing its primary care practices, adding new clinics in Candler and Leicester. Mission is also building new practices in South Asheville at Biltmore Park and in Spruce Pine.

The future of health care will focus on access to a primary care medical home and a team of clinicians who can support patients in staying well or managing any chronic diseases, Hoggard-Green said.

“One of the things that MAHEC has done extraordinarily well is they have been both developing those models, those team-based models, and have a very excellent quality team that’s been doing a fair amount of research on how to improve quality of care in primary care,” Hoggard-Green said. “As our manager now in our primary care practices, we are going to be working with them to apply those principles and improve the quality of care across many of our communities.”