

THE UNION

March 14, 2017

Other Voices

Scott McFarland: Communication, preventive care critical to your health – and future

Health care is the cornerstone of a community. Regardless of age — from still-developing babies to centenarians — health is the foundation for the future. Western Sierra Medical Clinic is committed to providing comprehensive health care to the communities that we serve.

It's not always easy. There are often challenges, from the economy to the political environment. Regardless of the challenges, our mission remains the same. How we meet that far-reaching goal has definitely changed in recent years, and will continue to evolve.

For decades, health care centered on a fee-for-service model, where revenue is based on services provided, from procedures to tests. Today, health care is moving to value-based medicine, where communication and relationships between patients and providers are critical to keeping patients healthy and improve the lives of those with chronic conditions, such as arthritis or diabetes.

Western Sierra Medical has been an early adopter of value-based medicine, making primary care the center of health care for patients. The connection between patient and provider has never been more important.

Preventive care – annual checkups, immunizations and scheduled exams, such as mammograms or prostate checks – is a major part of primary care.

Health care is an everyday issue. It's more than just about an annual checkup, a bad cold, nagging cough or minor injury. Certainly, all are important issues and need attention, but providers must also dig deeper and get to know patients – and what patients need. Patients must be open and share more information beyond just health issues. Troubles at home, a job loss and stress can all have a dramatic effect on health.

Our health care professionals are focused on health and wellness – and helping and healing. The treat-the-whole person approach to health care is the primary reason for our success.

We provide health care to about one of every four residents in Nevada and Sierra counties, with more than 54,000 patient visits in 2016. (The average patient visits our health centers three times per year.) Western Sierra has been attracting more Medicare and private insurers, as more community members – your family, friends and neighbors – are learning about our approach and commitment to health care.

Our fast-paced growth follows the recent evolution of health care, and a fast-changing attitude to the importance of taking care of oneself.

Preventive care – annual checkups, immunizations and scheduled exams, such as mammograms or prostate checks – is a major part of primary care. Another critical component is determining where you should seek treatment.

Western Sierra is focused on providing many services at our health centers. For example, patients can access medical, dental and behavioral health services. The Grass Valley health center also features specialists – such as a maternity unit, pediatrics, women's and men's health, gastrointestinal, nutrition services and addiction management – and an on-site lab and pharmacy.

In addition, we offer urgent care services for our patients and everyone in the community. Urgent care caters to those dealing with minor illnesses and injuries, and helps ease the burden in the local emergency room.

Health care continues to change and Western Sierra will lead the way by providing accessible, affordable, quality health services in the communities that we serve.

Scott McFarland is chief executive officer of Western Sierra Medical Clinic, the largest outpatient provider in Nevada and Sierra counties.