

The Role of Retail Clinics in the Healthcare Continuum: Creating Strategies and Partnerships to Meet Consumers' Demands

LAURA GREENE: Welcome to HealthSounds. I'm Laura Greene for the Healthcare Intelligence Network. Today I am speaking with Dr. Thomas Atkins, medical director of Sutter Express Care, drugstore-based medical clinics that are part of Sutter Health's network of hospitals and doctors serving Northern California. Dr. Atkins is presenting at HIN's webinar "The Role of Retail Clinics in the Healthcare Continuum: Creating Strategies and Partnerships to Meet Consumers' Demands." Welcome and thanks for joining me today doctor.

DR. THOMAS ATKINS, MEDICAL DIRECTOR OF SUTTER EXPRESS CARE,
DRUGSTORE-BASED MEDICAL CLINICS THAT ARE PART OF SUTTER HEALTH'S
NETWORK OF HOSPITALS AND DOCTORS SERVING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:
Well thanks for inviting me.

LAURA GREENE: To begin with, I see that Sutter Express Care offers six locations in your region. How do you determine where to establish these locations? Do you plan to open anymore in the immediate or distant future?

DR. THOMAS ATKINS: We determine where to open these locations based on the target demographic audiences that we were looking for. So we were looking for young families that help their needs that had busy lives where these clinics would serve the objectives of access and affordability for this demographic. We also looked at where we currently had healthcare services and where we wanted to have healthcare services in the future and that also influenced our choice of sites. We do plan to extend the model over time as we get more experience with it and

understand how the business model works in the various types of models that we might put in place across northern California. And we are working on a couple of other options right now to see if we can improve in terms of our efficiency and operational effectiveness.

LAURA GREENE: Thank you doctor. Do your retail clinics share information with the patients PCP?

DR. THOMAS ATKINS: Yes. Our clinics use the same electronic health records that our PCPs use. All of the records, all of the care that's documented, provided, ordered, or otherwise documented in that health record is available to the PCP. It is also forwarded to the PCP if any of their patients visit our clinics.

LAURA GREENE: I see. To date have your retail clinics had any impact on reducing non-emergent emergency department use?

DR. THOMAS ATKINS: We don't have any hard data on that issue, but we believe that we are having an impact. About half of our patients are cash pay and we believe that about half of those are uninsured. And if they go on to get sicker, we're quite sure they would present themselves to the emergency room. And we think that some of the patients that we see on a frequent service basis and out of our managed care population as well, but we have not been able to collect hard data on that fact yet.

LAURA GREENE: Okay. Thanks doctor. Can retail clinics help decrease the cost of healthcare?

DR. THOMAS ATKINS: I think there's some debate about that. Insurance companies are concerned that retail clinics may actually increase the cost by increasing the number of visits in-patients seek a year. There's also some research going on right now to try and determine if patients that are seen in the retail clinic are actually seeing their doctor in addition to that or adding cost to the system by having two visits instead of one for the illness they might present. But overall it makes intuitive sense that we probably are decreasing the cost of healthcare. We're trying to provide services at a more convenient time when the service might preclude the seeking of other services within the health system that would be more expensive. And certainly it helps to manage our capacity at demand during peak volume months.

LAURA GREENE: Thank you doctor. And finally, Wal-Mart recently closed 23 of its 80 retail clinics citing debt and inability to pay it's medical staff and vendors. Will this have an effect on retail clinics strategies of other organizations? Is this a warning for other retail clinics? How should retail clinics react to this news?

DR. THOMAS ATKINS: I think different clinics will react differently to that news. Certainly the commercial operators of retail clinics are going to look at this closely in terms of the implications it has for the way that they conduct their business. And certainly a lot of questions will be asked about why was that model unsuccessful in the locations where it existed? What was the real reason that this company decided to pull out? For Wal-Mart, I'm sure it will cause them to look at their investment in both the size of the space that they used for these clinics and the reliability of the folks that they

contract with. So I'm sure that there's some lessons for all of us in that news.

LAURA GREENE: Thank you doctor. Those are all the questions I have for you today. Thanks for being with us and we're looking forward to hearing from you during the webinar.

DR. THOMAS ATKINS: Well it will be a pleasure to join you then, and thanks for asking me to participate.

LAURA GREENE: To register or get more information about this webinar, please call 1-888-446-3530. This is Laura Greene for the Healthcare Intelligence Network.