

# Harvard Pilgrim adds Fallon Clinic doctors to network

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by Pat Healy  
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WORCESTER — Fallon Clinic, which used to serve patients of Fallon Community Health Plan only, is joining Harvard Pilgrim Health Care's provider network, a move that strengthens Harvard Pilgrim's network in Massachusetts and marks the continuation of a strategic transformation for Fallon Clinic.

Dr. Craig Samitt, chief operating officer for Fallon Clinic, says this decision benefits more than just the two companies. "I think the bigger benefit is for current and former patients," he said. "Now that we're accepting most types nearly 90 percent of the Massachusetts marketplace can come to Fallon Clinic doctors."

This marks the second time this year that Fallon Clinic has relaxed its exclusivity with Fallon Community Health Plan. In August Fallon Clinic signed with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts whereby all BCBSMA enrollees will have access to Fallon Clinic's 240 physicians and services.

Dr. Samitt said Fallon Clinic is not burning any bridges with Fallon Community Health Plan, but allowed that these recent agreements with other providers will change the relationship between the two Fallon companies.

"We have historically had a more exclusive relationship with Fallon Community Health Plan," he said, "and our signing contracts with other health plans will have an effect on Fallon Community Health Plan. However, Fallon Community Health Plan has a firm stronghold in the Worcester marketplace and has a strong community presence and they are likely to do well in the coming years."

Vin Capozzi, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Harvard Pilgrim, said he doesn't think Fallon Community Health Plan is happy about the new relationships.

"I think this is going to create a new level of competition which they might not be all that excited about," he said.

Capozzi also said he thinks this new plan is a step in the right direction for Fallon Clinic, and definitely the right move for Harvard Pilgrim.

"I just think this was a point in time where Fallon Clinic needed to become a multi-carrier," he said. "From our perspective this is a long overdue repair of a gap in our network in Worcester County."

Charles D. Baker, Harvard Pilgrim president and CEO, agreed.

"Adding the Fallon Clinic doctors will mean even more choice and greater convenience and will give us as extensive a network as any health plan now operating in the area," he said.

According to Baker, Harvard Pilgrim already had 1,500 physicians in the greater Worcester area.

Fallon Clinic President Dr. Baltej S. Maini said he had heard so many complaints from members who had to discontinue their relationships with the doctors at Fallon Clinic because a health plan change at their jobs, or a job change that meant a health plan change, that continuity for patients became a key priority and expanding Fallon's roster of payor contracts seemed like the most logical answer.

"In an effort to ensure that our patients can continue to receive care with their Fallon Clinic physician even if their insurance coverage changes, we decided that it was time to expand our relationships with a wider spectrum of health plans," he said. "We are in the process of redefining the standards by which health care is delivered and measured, and our new relationship with Harvard Pilgrim is a key component of that evolution."

Samitt agreed.

"We had been sensing a lot of frustration in the marketplace because patients haven't had access to us due to the types of insurance they have held," he said.

Samitt also said Fallon Clinic's goal is to become the gold standard in healthcare delivery.

"When patients come to the doctor's office they want to be treated the way they are treated when they come to the nicest hotels and the nicest airlines," he said. "Healthcare seems to be the only service industry these days that doesn't act like one, and Fallon wants to change this."

He said Fallon Clinic is looking to technology to further ensure patients receive the finest medical care and the highest levels of access and service.

"Service enhancements can be made on performance and quality," he said.

Under terms of the agreement, Harvard Pilgrim members will have access to Fallon Clinic's physicians and specialists starting Jan. 1, 2004. □