

AtlantiCare collaborating with Advocare, Continuum

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MARLTON, N.J. — Advocare and its physician practice management subsidiary Continuum Health Alliance signed a collaboration deal with AtlantiCare that will give physicians options for how they choose to practice medicine under health-care reform.

“The health-care environment is so crazy right now,” said Dr. John M. Tedeschi, chairman and CEO of Advocare and Continuum. “This [collaboration] is going to give doctors a chance to think about their own future and what way they want to go.”



Under the agreement, Continuum will provide administrative services for AtlantiCare’s 100 employed physicians — such as information technology help, practice management support, and revenue cycle enhancement — freeing doctors to spend more time on patient care. Additionally, AtlantiCare will work with Advocare on quality of care and patient access initiatives.

The deal provides an option for affiliated doctors not employed by AtlantiCare to remain largely independent, but join an as yet unnamed physician network that will be marketed by Atlantic Care and supported by Continuum’s practice management services. Independent physicians affiliated with AtlantiCare will also have the option of joining Advocare under a traditional full employment model.

Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Tedeschi said it was difficult to put a dollar value on the alliance because it will depend on what options the physicians choose. Advocare has a membership fee to

join, while Continuum’s fees are a percentage of the billing revenues it collects.

“It’s not the biggest deal we’ve done,” he said, “but it’s one of our bigger deals.”

Advocare and Continuum, both based in Marlton, were founded in 1998 by Tedeschi, a nationally known pediatrician and Camden native. Advocare, which started as an alliance of 33 pediatricians, has grown into one of the region’s largest independent, multispecialty physician groups. It now has more than 60 practices and 85 offices that care for more than 500,000 patients.

AtlantiCare, an integrated health-care delivery system, is the parent organization for AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center, AtlantiCare Physicians Group, AtlantiCare Health Solutions and AtlantiCare Health Services. It has more than 5,282 employees and 600 physicians who provide health-care services in more than 60 locations.

James Nolan, AtlantiCare’s chief financial officer, said the partnership with Continuum and Advocare grew out of the health system’s desire to work with its physicians “in the new world post-health-care reform.”

Said Nolan, “We all have a lot of transformation to go through.”

Nolan said giving employed and affiliated doctors the various options for how they want to practice in the future all share the common theme of relieving physicians of chores such as billing and coding and collecting payments so they can spend more time with patients. “They can be a doctor and not an administrator,” he said.

Dr. Marilouise Venditti, chief medical officer at AtlantiCare, said the partnership will allow AtlantiCare to bring more value to local businesses wrestling with rising health-care costs and physicians “trying to provide quality care while coping with reduced reimbursements and administrative issues.”



CURT HUDSON

Dr. John M. Tedeschi is the CEO of Advocare and Continuum.

Tedeschi believes doctors will find it difficult to remain completely independent under health-care reform, which includes bonus payments for investing in and using electronic medical records — and penalties for those who do not. Tedeschi said the reform law also provides the framework for heightened levels of risk contracts, which involve provider groups taking on greater fiscal responsibility for patient care and management in deals with health insurers.

Last month, Continuum signed a collaboration deal with Atlantic Health System in North Jersey under which the two organizations are working together to develop a primary-care network of physicians, called Primary Care Partners, that will be affiliated with Atlantic Health’s three hospitals: Morristown Medical Center, Newton Medical Center and Overlook Medical Center in Summit, Union County.

Continuum will provide the Primary Care Partners practices with information technology services, operational and administrative services, scheduling and patient navigation systems, customer service training, revenue cycle management, and other practice management support.