

WeCare tlc Clinics Stay Open Even Through Pandemic



When COVID-19 hit the U.S., many people put their routine health care visits on the back burner. Businesses went on lockdown to prevent spread of the pandemic. Medical professionals who remained at work were too busy handling suspected or confirmed cases of the coronavirus to deal with anything less serious than, say, a heart condition. The risks of going into public places weighed heavy on the minds of patients, who decided to just wait.

In some workplaces, however, health care visits have continued as usual because of the services of WeCare tlc, a family-owned company based in Lake Mary that operates on-site and near-site wellness centers for more than 100 employers in 10 states. The company had to make adjustments at first to secure additional personal protective equipment (PPE) for its employees and adapt to the effects of the pandemic, but it prides itself on its swift response to keep patients healthy.

“When access was shut down in other places, we still did outreach disease management calls,” said Raegan Garber Le Douaron, president of WeCare tlc. “We were able to quickly pivot to telehealth because we had those systems built in. And while we were ensuring proper PPE supplies, we were still dispensing medication and monitoring those chronic conditions.

“Our clinicians realized how valuable they are. Our clients did, too, because they saw very clearly what everyone else didn’t have and what they were able to have.”

Le Douaron became president of the company in 2018 after working there for 12 years with her mother and stepfather, Judy Garber and Lynn Jennings, who founded the company in 2005 as a complement to health care and medical insurance businesses they were operating. She brought on Chief of Clinical Services Fayshonda Cooks, DrPH, RN, BSN — a move that proved to be fortuitous when COVID-19 broke out soon after. The two joke today about how neither of

them slept much in the early days of the pandemic, when they were working nonstop to keep up with breaking developments about the illness and protocols for handling it.

“Fay and I talked about ‘hashtag no sleep’ for weeks,” Le Douaron said. “We were managing health centers in all these states, with things changing by the hour. Every morning, Fay would write an update to send to our clients, and she had to revise it twice by 10 a.m. By the end of the day, it wouldn’t be relevant any longer because things were changing that fast. But it allowed us the opportunity to define how and what to share with our clients and be closer with them.”

A Growing Need

WeCare tlc was formed as a way to proactively bring down the cost of health care for employers through what the company calls medical risk management. It started providing wellness clinics inside large employment hubs, such as manufacturing sites, in regions that were too small to have major clusters of hospitals and medical offices.

“Two things happened simultaneously that made our business grow in directions we weren’t necessarily expecting,” Le Douaron said. “Usually there’s a large employer in a small or medium-size town that everyone knows. Other business leaders and the whole community look to them as leaders. When we started doing this, other employers would call and ask if they could use that employer’s health center.”

WeCare tlc facilitated those conversations, which led to collaborative clinics that now make up half of the company’s business.

“At the same time, the other major company we owned was underwriting health care plans for employers, so we saw how and why their health care costs were rising,” she said. “We saw that employers were at a disadvantage.”

The company built its own system to produce data about costs, health outcomes and other factors. It noticed a trend. “These larger employers were the higher-paying employers of the area, so you would have people driving 60-plus miles to come to work. The health center was fine when they were at work. But what happened when they were not at work, or to their families, who never came to their place of employment? They still needed health care and were acquiring it in a way that didn’t work for the patients or for the employers who were paying the bills.”

The answer: Set up satellite locations closer to where clusters of workers lived. That turned into the company’s near-site business and made wellness care more convenient for employees, while still holding down costs for employers.

Caring Clinicians

Today, WeCare tlc employs about 250 people in its clinics nationwide, with about 30 people in Central Florida. As a nurse for almost 30 years, with a doctorate in public health leadership, Cooks knows the importance of keeping the clinicians, as workers, happy and safe.

She and Le Douaron said they received numerous thank-you’s from clinical team members for keeping the health centers open so they could continue to feed their families, and for ensuring they had PPE and policies to keep them safe from COVID-19 infection. The clinicians form bonds with the workers and families they serve, and it was important to them to keep those patients healthy.

“It’s important that we understand how much we impact the patients’ safety and care,” Cooks said. “It’s been such a blessing to see our patients benefit from having a team focused on making sure they get quality services at this time.

To read the full article, click [here](#).