

# Seton's doctor ranks growing

## Seton seeking more specialists, surgeons

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Seton Family of Hospitals is looking for doctors for its Physician Enterprise, the system's new model for employing physicians.

Seton's Physician Enterprise, officially launched in 2009, is a startup within the health care system that exemplifies the direction Seton is headed in for the age of health care reform. The startup not only employs physicians, but also employs doctors in training through its partnership with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas.

Although still a work in progress, Physician Enterprise has three main service areas. The first is to employ physicians; the second is to be a medical services organization that handles business operations for physicians, which removes paperwork from a physician's duties.

The third is developing wellness programs that concentrate on keeping patients out of hospital beds.

This month, Seton promoted physician **Samson Jesudass**, director of the Physician Enterprise, to lead the nonprofit health care organization that employs physicians for the Seton Family of Hospitals.

Seton formed Physician Enterprise to fulfill the nonprofit hospital system's mission to care for the poor and vulnerable, and supply the community with specialists needed for quality care, Jesudass said.

As of February, Seton's upstart had 461 physicians employed. Of those, 264 are faculty or attending physicians, 195 are residents and two are dentists.

Jesudass anticipates hiring 20 more physicians by the end of 2011, and about 50 physicians in 2012. Besides hiring physicians directly, Physician Enterprise has formed alliances with doctors who are connected with Seton on a contractual basis, allowing them to remain in private practice. Physicians contracted with Seton are allowed to practice at other hospitals.

Nationally, other hospital systems are developing models for employing physicians, which is seen as one way to create an accountable care organization, or ACO.

The new health care law includes ACOs, which the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation describes as the latest model for delivering service that “offers doctors and hospitals financial incentives to provide good-quality care to Medicare beneficiaries while keeping down costs.”

Seton has said it wants to create a patient-centric model that it calls a high-reliability organization, which means the hospital is accountable for improving patient care.

With the uncertainty of today’s health care market, more physicians are looking at becoming part of hospital systems, such as Seton, insiders said.

Jesudass said he wants to hire doctors from Austin, but because many of the physicians here in private practice are profitable and stable, he is concentrating recruitment outside the area.

Physician Enterprise employs internists, family practice physicians, pediatricians, neurosurgeons, cardiologists, gastroenterologists and other specialists. It is looking to augment that assortment with additional specialists, including neurologists, psychiatrists, orthopedic physicians and specialists in infectious diseases.

Meanwhile, the group is filling a vital community role by training physicians who will ideally stay in the Austin area, Jesudass said.

Physician Enterprise’s goal is to be a self-sustaining model, but it hasn’t reached that yet.

“It’s a growing, evolving model. Exactly where health care reform is headed,” Jesudass said.

Under health care reform, there is a push toward compensating hospitals and physicians based on their ability to keep patients well.

With that in mind, Jesudass said Physician Enterprise will be responsible for developing wellness initiatives toward that end.

Temple-based Scott & White Healthcare, whose presence in Austin is growing, began as a physician-operated hospital system. Under Scott & White’s nonprofit model, the hospital system is run by a board of trustees made up of physicians and members of the community.

Similar to Seton, Scott & White has been adding physicians and mid-level staff to meet anticipated needs from the thousands more Central Texans who will have insurance under health care reform starting in 2014, Chief Medical Officer **Glen Couchman** said.

“We’ve certainly been in growth mode for several years. I think there is an importance to achieving scale in terms of controlling costs,” Couchman said. “We are adding quite a few physicians as we deal with dramatic cost-cutting on the inpatient and outpatient side of things.”

Scott & White has been adding about 100 physicians, nurses, physician assistants and certified registered nurse anesthetists a year for the last several years, and it expects to do the same this year. In total, Scott & White employs about 900 physicians.

Couchman believes more hospital systems across the country will develop models for employing physicians.

“The theory behind it is that if a physician’s focus is really on the practice of medicine, they can direct their energies to that instead of dealing with the financial issues and insurance,” Couchman said. “I believe we do get better outcomes and more efficiencies.”

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**