



## **FCHP On Pace To Expand Elder Services**

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*By Ric Gross*

Having expanded its HMO presence in central and eastern Massachusetts last year, Fallon Community Health Plan is now increasing its PACE in 2006.

FCHP, which has operated a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) in Worcester for 10 years, is planning to open three additional sites this year—one in Worcester, one in Charlton, the other in a to-be-determined city in the area north of Worcester. PACE is a capitated benefit authorized by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 that features a comprehensive service delivery system and integrated Medicare and Medicaid financing. The program is designed to keep elders in the community and out of nursing homes, to the extent possible.

Dubbed Summit ElderCare, FCHP's program offers seniors and their caregivers the benefit of personalized medical attention and supportive services. There are currently 257 members in FCHP's PACE program. It is the only one operating in Central Massachusetts, with five others statewide and more than 40 nationwide. However, FCHP is the only HMO to run a PACE program in Massachusetts, with most others tied to medical centers, hospitals or community health centers, according to FCHP spokeswoman Christina Sciammacco.

"We believe it is unique to us and really differentiates us from our competition," she said. "We are in our tenth year. When we looked at the program 10 years later, we looked at a variety of things, including what we could do to better market it."

The program was formerly known as Elder Service Plan. However, there was brand confusion due to a similarly named entity. Therefore, when the expansion plans were announced, the new "Summit ElderCare" name made its debut, along with a new Web site and a new marketing push.

**Setting The PACE.** According to Summit ElderCare's Web site, the PACE model started in the 1970s in San Francisco, as members of the Chinatown-Northbeach community were seeking home-based alternatives to nursing home care for their elders who had immigrated from China, Italy and the Philippines.

However, with no luck in finding a solution, the community formed a nonprofit service organization known as On Lok Senior Health Services to provide care for the elderly through a community-based system, setting the stage for the PACE evolution.

Based on the success of efforts in San Francisco, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services received a grant to develop a model for this type of care that could be replicated in other parts of the country.

PACE programs are supported and regulated by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and state administering agencies, with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services being the administering agency in Massachusetts.

**Provider Contracts.** Meanwhile, on its HMO side, FCHP has inked a pair of new provider contracts, signing deals with Nashoba Valley Medical Center and Merrimack Valley Hospital.

The Nashoba Valley deal gives FCHP Select Care members access to more than 70 physicians and to the hospital itself, while the Merrimack Valley deal gives Select Care members access to a 108-bed facility with more than 200 physicians as members of the medical staff.

FCHP has been taking aggressive steps of late to expand its network of hospitals and physicians statewide. Since the introduction of its Select Care product, FCHP has expanded its network to more than 12,000 physicians and 44 contracted hospitals. ■