



Posted on Thu, Sep. 25, 2008

## Preferred looking to add Galichia to network

**Via Christi's Preferred Health Systems is adding Via Christi competitor Galichia Heart Hospital as an in-network hospital, possibly by Jan. 1.**

BY ANDI ATWATER  
The Wichita Eagle

Wichita's largest health insurance carrier will break from tradition by adding Galichia Heart Hospital to its network of providers.

Preferred Health Systems, which is owned by Via Christi Health System, said it will add Galichia -- a Via Christi competitor -- as an in-network hospital effective Jan. 1.

The move has the potential to change the way health care is delivered in Wichita as more employers demand choice in their benefits and smaller hospitals such as Galichia begin competing on a larger scale.

"That's what we've always wanted, to be able to compete on quality and price," said Stephen Harris, chief executive of Galichia Heart Hospital. "Now patients will have a choice."

Preferred insures more than 125,000 people in south-central Kansas.

Wichita historically has been a two-provider town -- HCA-owned Wesley Medical Center, and the two acute-care hospitals within the Via Christi Regional Medical Center.

While several insurance carriers service the Wichita market, the two largest carriers -- Preferred and Blue Cross Blue and Blue Shield of Kansas -- split most employers between Via Christi and Wesley.

Preferred president and chief executive Marlon Dauner said the change in strategy is employer- and hospital-driven as the company responds to changing market demands.

"We're looking at a number of things that reposition where we are in the market right now," he said. "I think a lot of this will just play out over time. But the opportunities to look at other contracts is at least on the table for the short term, and we'll give them some consideration."

Those market changes include Via Christi's planned west Wichita hospital, which Dauner said may have implications on other service areas and components in the system's delivery network.

Preferred also could pick up a sizable portion of Hawker Beechcraft employees as the aircraft manufacturer offers for the first time a choice between Preferred and Blue Cross effective Jan. 1.

The company might pick up more state employees next year as well, so expanding options in the Wichita market becomes a value-added move for clients, Dauner said.

"We're trying to accommodate the market and be responsive to what we anticipate the needs will be," he said.

Employers such as Hawker Beechcraft also are realizing they have a strong role in directing their health care dollars and employees want more choices, said Dan Dymarkowski, director of labor relations and health services for Hawker Beechcraft, which employs about 9,000 in Wichita.

"This really allows us to partner with our employees by offering a new choice," he said. "Hopefully they become wiser consumers and maybe we can help them get there."

"We have two excellent systems (with Wesley and Via Christi). Galichia has a good product... and it's nice if we can get in there. It adds value to our benefits."

For Galichia administrators, this has been a long time coming.

The physician-owned facility at 2610 N. Woodlawn opened in 2001 as a specialty hospital and quickly became

licensed as an acute-care, general service facility. The hospital added an emergency department in 2006.

"The offer of a contract from Preferred serves as a validation of our business model," Harris said. "I believe this move on the part of Preferred is a signal that they're very focused on utilization and on the patients' right to choose, and we applaud them for that."

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