

Oklahoma Health Care Authority
4545 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Ste. 124
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
(405) 522-7300



NEWS RELEASE *May 14, 2007*

Contact: Jo Kilgore, Public Information Manager
(405) 522-7474

“For Immediate Release”

Care facilities’ staff benefits from state insurance assistance program

OKLAHOMA CITY – Oklahoma’s program to help small businesses purchase insurance for their employees is making a big difference in a short time for workers at several participating care facilities.

Scott Pilgrim, who owns nursing homes in Bixby and Medford and a home for adults with developmental disabilities in Beggs, enrolled in the Employer Sponsored Insurance program less than two months ago. The program for companies with 50 or fewer employees is offered through the Oklahoma Employer/employee Partnership for Insurance Coverage, or O-EPIC, which combines contributions from the employer and employee with state funds from the tobacco tax to buy health insurance on the private market.

“It’s fantastic. Our employees really love it,” he said. “I’ve heard comments from ‘This is a big relief’ to ‘Now I can afford my medicine. It won’t be such a struggle.’”

Few nursing facilities can afford to offer health insurance for their line staff, even though they are providing patient care, Pilgrim said.

“We had some ‘better than nothing’ insurance in place, because that was all we or they could afford. Now, we have a full-blown insurance policy, and even folks making \$8 to \$10 an hour can afford it. Some have coverage for them and their spouse for a cost to them of \$28 a month,” he said.

Signing up for O-EPIC wasn’t any more or less difficult than applying for any other health insurance, he said, “and we have a standard insurance plan, not a narrowed set of benefits.”

While he anticipates being able to offer health insurance will help with employee recruitment and retention, Pilgrim also sees a more immediate advantage: healthier, more content employees. “I expect we’ll have a work force that’s less reliant on the workers comp system and a work force that’s happier and will stay with us longer,” he said.

O-EPIC also offers premium assistance through an Individual Plan to individuals who cannot access O-EPIC through their employer, including people who are self-employed or who may be temporarily unemployed. Those who qualify can buy health insurance directly through the state. The premiums are based on a sliding scale depending on the person’s income.

For more information about O-EPIC, call 1-888-365-3742, or visit the Web site at www.insureoklahoma.org.

#30#