

Takeover means major overhaul in family health

By Paul Brooks

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New Paltz — More than \$7 million is pouring into family health centers in the mid-Hudson.

The money is linked to the acquisition of the former Mid-Hudson Family Health Institute by the former Institute for Urban Family Health in New York City. Dr. David Mesches founded the mid-Hudson institute and is retiring at the end of the year.

The new nonprofit is the Institute for Family Health. The yearlong transfer was just completed, according to an announcement being made today.

The deal puts more financial muscle into primary health care for about 43,000 patients in Ulster, Sullivan and Dutchess counties. The new system has a total of 16 full-time and eight part-time health centers. Improvements are already underway:

- Obtaining \$1.3 million in grants, including \$1 million from the New York State Health Foundation
- Securing a loan of \$5.8 million from the Primary Care Development Corp.,
- Purchase of the family practice centers in Ellenville and Kingston and transferring other leases
- Installation of electronic practice management at all sites,
- New electronic record systems in New Paltz and Hyde Park with the other sites coming online by year's end.

The new organization will train 42 family practice residents a year in both rural and urban settings, said Dr. Neil Calman, president and CEO of the Institute for Family Health.

The network is federally qualified, which boosts reimbursement rates and helps with medical malpractice insurance, Calman said.

Ronda Kotelchuck, the executive director of the **Primary Care Development Corp.**, explains why she backed the new institute. "Primary health care is the key to a more effective, lower cost health-care system, and this acquisition will strengthen care delivery for the institute's 75,000 patients."

Calman has more plans for the future.

By next fall, patients will be able to access much of their own medical record online. They will be able to schedule appointments, request referrals and prescriptions, and send secure messages to their doctors, Calman said. Further down the road, Calman wants to pinpoint the regional pockets where residents lack medical service and fill that need with graduates from the institute's residency programs.

"There is an extraordinary shortage of primary care physicians all through the mid-Hudson," Calman said.

"If we can strengthen that, that would be our goal going forward."