

# Pediatrics business no longer child's play in Central Texas

by Sandra Zaragoza

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Pediatric medicine in Central Texas is undergoing a growth spurt prompted by population growth, suburban sprawl and the extensive reach of Dell Children's Medical Center.

Leading the pack is Lone Star Circle of Care, a network of federally qualified health clinics, which has positioned itself as a major player in pediatric services, thanks to partnerships with Scott & White Healthcare and Seton Family of Hospitals' Dell Children's Medical Center. Under an agreement with Seton announced this year, LSCC has five Dell Children's–Circle of Care Pediatrics clinics in Williamson County. Seton has invested more than \$3 million in grants to support the regional pediatric primary care network.

LSCC also partnered with Scott & White Healthcare on two clinics in Bell County north of Austin, including a pediatric clinic. The alliance makes sense as Scott & White establishes a children's hospital in Temple. Slated to open in late 2011, it will be the first standalone children's hospital between Austin and Dallas. LSCC also has a partnership with St. David's Healthcare System, but it has no pediatric clinics under it.

LSCC hopes to add as many as five pediatric clinics in 2011 and 2012, as it looks to bring greater access to primary pediatric care to Central Texas suburbs.

Meanwhile, Dell Children's–Circle of Care isn't the only growing pediatric care network in the area. Austin Regional Clinic, Specially for Children, Strictly Pediatric Surgery Center and Carousel Pediatrics have all grown or are growing their practices along with the population.

## The Dell Children's effect

Insiders point to Dell Children's, which serves children in a 46-county area, as a major factor in the growth of pediatric services.

**Pete Perialas**, CEO of LSCC, said having a children's hospital of such stature has been a boon to pediatric medicine and the quality of care for residents.

“When you have Dell Children's, it fuels the growth of primary pediatric care,” he said.

Dell Children's has brought specialists and researchers to the region. Families and patients no longer have to travel to Dallas or Houston for specialized care, creating a bigger demand for local primary care and other specialty services, Perialas said.

Then there's also Scott & White to consider, experts said.

“Dell Children's and Scott & White are in a race to get a presence in the market,” said **Troy Chapman**, executive project manager for **Burt-Watts Inc.** construction firm, adding that both are advancing their presences through new pediatric clinics.

Burt-Watts, a specialist in health care construction, built LSCC's two newest pediatric clinics.

Dell Children's–Circle of Care pediatric clinics, which each encompass about 5,000 square feet and have 12 to 15 exam rooms, are in Georgetown, Round Rock, Cedar Park and Hutto. LSCC also has an adolescent clinic in Round Rock.

Meanwhile, Specially for Children, a group of pediatric subspecialty physicians affiliated with Dell Children's, is adding a 12,000-square-foot location off of Far West Boulevard and Mopac Expressway. The new office, which will have eight exam rooms, will be finished at the end of the year.

Similarly, Austin Regional Clinic said demand for its pediatric services has risen. The clinic system offers pediatric services at 10 of its 18 clinics. ARC, which has 58 pediatric staffers, including doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners, has hired an average of three pediatric staffers a year for the last three years.

**Heidi Shalev**, ARC marketing and communications manager, said ARC sees a need for more players in pediatric medicine.

“We serve about 25 percent of the population. We welcome quality care and greater access for pediatric and adult patients,” she said.

Perialas of LSCC said having freestanding clinics takes care of a big issue for parents — convenience.

“You put them where the kids and families live and work, and that makes them much more accessible,” he said, adding that LSCC's newest pediatric clinic in Hutto is near capacity daily. “Folks that had to drive into Austin for care now drive to the clinic.”

Perialas believes Dell Children's-Circle of Care's model will be attractive to families at all income levels because of its electronic health record system. LSCC's system has interoperability with Dell Children's, Scott & White and other health care providers. The overall LSCC model earned recognition as a Patient Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance, which recognizes models of care that strengthen the physician-patient relationship and demonstrate improved health outcomes.

A child served at LSCC will be linked to a wider health care system. Each child's records will be accessible to physicians when needed and duplication of medical tests will be avoided, Perialas said.

Although the clinics will primarily serve uninsured and underinsured families, Perialas believes families with insurance will also be attracted to the model.

"Whether they are insured or uninsured, they see the value in full electronic health records and the health home status," he said. "You will see a substantial partner in Dell Children's over the next few years."

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