

Medical companies play growing role in Douglas County

By Roger Diez, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

Motorists traveling south on Highway 395 to Minden and Gardnerville can't help but notice the impressive eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada and ranchlands stretching out on both sides of the highway. What they often don't see, however, is the small but growing presence of medical-related industry that is a part of Douglas County's efforts to bring business and industry to the area.

As Douglas County's Economic Vitality Manager Lisa Granahan says, "We want to create a business community to match the scenery."

Granahan is working closely with the Northern Nevada Development Authority to recruit biomedical companies to the area. Biomedical is just one of a number of "cluster" industries that make up NNDA's regional nine-county strategy.

NNDA Deputy Director Maurice Washington said that NNDA is working on a biomedical center incorporating Douglas County and Carson City.

"We are working with Carson-Tahoe Regional Healthcare on the medical side of things," said Washington. Elements of the NNDA plan include vitamin and pharmaceutical manufacturing, adult stem cell research, medical device manufacturing, holistic health initiatives and medical tourism. "We are talking to the folks at Edgewood on the medical tourism piece. Europe is light years ahead of us in this field, and we'd like to recapture some of those dollars that are going offshore for medical treatments," Washington said.

Although the biomedical segment is still small in Douglas County, it is already very diverse. Here's a snapshot of some of the companies currently in operation in Douglas County.

Comfort Care dentistry management

Formed in November 2011 and operational since February, Comfort Care is a dental management company that helps dentists focus on dentistry by assuming the administrative functions of the dental office.

According to Deputy General Counsel Ashley Cox, the company's staff takes care of human resources, payroll, accounting, insurance, legal and contract issues through their Patient Relations Management Center.

The company also operates its own dental offices in Walmart stores in California and Arizona, partnering with the giant retailer and Colgate-Palmolive to educate patients and to bring affordable dentistry within easy reach of people who might not otherwise afford it. Plans include a dental lab in Gardnerville to provide laboratory services to their company-owned and client dental offices.

Currently at 10 employees locally, plans are to grow the PRM business as needed to support the field dental offices, with additional employment when the lab opens. The company was recently recognized by NNDA at the Bubbles and Barbecue awards dinner.

Injectimed, which does business as Frontline Medical Products A recent transplant from Ojai, Calif., President and Chief Executive Officer Tom Kuracina is already a big booster of Douglas County. He cites the scenery, the frontier spirit, and the warmth and goodness of the people as the best things about moving to the area, along with the business-friendly climate and tax benefits.

The company is a developer of medical products with an

impressive patent portfolio. They currently are bringing to market a device that will go into medical kits for procedures such as inserting stents and pacemakers. It can also be used for cardiac catheters, anesthesia, oncology, emergency room procedures, and field use by EMTs for tracheotomies. Kuracina also has a series of safe hypodermic needle designs that prevent medical providers from accidental punctures. There are currently only three employees in the company, but he is planning to open a fulfillment center to distribute product. Manufacturing will be done by a U.S.-based contract manufacturer. Kuracina has high praise for NNDA, Western Nevada College, UNR and Casey, Neilon & Associates, all of which were instrumental in his move to northern Nevada.

Life Enhancement Products

Recent arrival Life Enhancement Products moved from Sonoma County to Minden in July. Already at 23 employees, the company runs two manufacturing shifts.

President and CEO Will Block cited Nevada's business-friendly atmosphere and tax structure, as well as the transportation infrastructure and high quality of employees as reasons for relocating. The company publishes a monthly magazine rooted in the most current literature on nutritional science, and staff members are continually testing and developing new products.

Block says that 65 percent of his readers and buyers are women ranging in age from low 40s to mid 60s, who are primarily interested in anti-aging and memory-enhancing products.

He recently returned from Poland, and plans to add that country to the nearly 100 countries where he distributes his products. As far as assistance from local agencies, Block said that NNDA's Rob Hooper has been very welcoming and has offered to help with training and hiring grants.

The company also got assistance from the Small Business Administration to get a loan to purchase their building in

Minden.

Bio-Pure Products

Much smaller, but no less enthusiastic about the area, Bio-Pure Products makes and distributes a bacteria/enzyme waste management product. Victoria Alexander-Cushman and her husband run the company with the help of two part-time employees.

The product was originally developed by a doctoral-level researcher in microbiology to maintain pure water in fish farms in third world countries. Bio-Pure obtained a license and adapted the product for use in cleaning vacuum systems in dental offices. It has been so successful that manufacturers of those systems now specify Bio-Pure as the cleaning agent required to maintain warranties. Alexander-Cushman says they are also investigating the use of their product in surgical applications. They relocated from California in 2009, and cite the better business climate and quality of life as prime factors. They have not sought any assistance from local agencies, but may do so as they expand.

HCI Sciences

This small, four-employee firm is poised to revolutionize anatomical pathology. Chief Medical officer Jerry Fredenburgh has developed a more reliable and environmentally friendly dye that is used to stain tissue sections. He teamed with healthcare sales expert Peggy Lyon to market the product to pathology labs. They chose this area because Nevada's regulatory climate is more conducive to development of medical manufacturing than California's.

With FDA certification of the 5,000 square foot lab and production facility in progress, the company plans to add employees in the first quarter of 2013. NNDA has provided assistance in the company's move to Minden.