

It's a match

Local doctors try online matchmaking with prospective patients

By Mollee Francisco

People can already choose prospective dates from the comfort of their own home, so why not doctors, too? That's the premise for a new program piloted in the southwest metro.

The online matchmaking program is called wellicks, and the idea is to give consumers more say in their health care experience.

Ridgeview Medical Center made the founding investment in the program in June 2007.

"I felt it was important for a nonprofit organization like Ridgeview to challenge ourselves to be innovative in responding to the needs of health care consumers in a way that could potentially also create alternative sources of revenue for the organization," said Robert Stevens, president and CEO of Ridgeview Medical Center, in a press release.

"Bob Stevens is a pretty entrepreneurial thinker in the business industry," said Lisa Suchy, wellicks executive vice president. "He views Ridgeview as a laboratory."

Ridgeview looked at a variety of different concepts before settling on wellicks, Suchy said.

The idea provides a service for patients, as well as doctors.

"Scheduling on the Web is a big thing for consumers and providers," said Suchy. "And

getting consumers in the door is very important for providers. This brought these two things together."

While wellicks is free for consumers, providers pay a monthly fee to be a part of the service. Their profiles are listed for potential patients to page through. Profiles include everything from location and hours of operation to credentials, scheduling availability and even personality to help patients find a doctor that fits their criteria.

The program is also able to tell patients which providers accept their insurance.

When the program goes live to consumers this summer, they will be able to view profiles and schedule appointments with providers specializing in dental, eye, chiropractic, complementary alternative medicine and mental health in the southwest metro. The plan is to eventually expand the program to more specialties across the Twin Cities metro and beyond.

"This is not exclusive to Ridgeview by any means," said Suchy.

The wellicks program is currently wrapping up product development and recruiting organizations to take part. So far, 12 organizations have signed on from areas including Chaska, Excelsior, Chanhassen and Waconia.

