

# EDITORIALS

## BMC, Touchmark take important step

One of the problems facing senior citizens in Bend, or many other communities for that matter, is the difficulty they have finding primary care physicians. It's an issue for the doctors, as well, who know federal Medicare reimbursement for treating seniors will not cover their costs. While a new partnership in Bend may not completely resolve the matter in this area, it's a good start.

Beginning this fall, Bend Memorial Clinic will combine efforts with Touchmark, a community for adults 55 and over, to open a satellite in one of the latter's buildings. The small clinic, staffed by a newly hired physician and a nurse practitioner, will provide primary care for up to 1,200 seniors who have been unable to get it elsewhere. Sharing operating costs with Touchmark will allow the clinic to hold its losses to a minimum, BMC officials hope.

There's no doubt the clinic is needed. Few primary care physicians in the area currently accept all comers where Medicare is involved, and it's difficult to blame them. Uncle Sam, which reimburses physicians for treating the elderly, has trimmed its cost overruns by clamping down on the amount it will pay doctors for providing treatment.

Doctors, meanwhile, have faced ever-steeper costs themselves. Thus, in the last two years, primary care

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physicians have seen their reimbursements rise by only 0.005 percent, while their costs have gone up an average of 6 percent annually. No one, not even the most altruistic, can make that kind of split acceptable for long.

It would be easy, and probably correct, to say that the problem lies in Washington, with Congress, which sets the limits on Medicare funding. Yet waiting for Washington to come up with a solution is no answer. A congressional fix is likely to be a long time coming, but senior Americans need health care today.

Providing even 1,200 seniors in Bend with care they cannot now get is nothing to sneeze at, then, and both BMC and Touchmark deserve thanks for their collaboration. Unfortunately, it's a partial answer only.