

[STARTING UP]

A LATE NIGHT RUN

After-hours pediatric practice fills void for affordable urgent care

A visit to a hospital emergency room can be a traumatic experience for both parents and their little ones. Witnessing this made it clear to Dr. Anastasia Gentles, a practicing pediatrician, that there must be a better alternative. "I saw a need and that's what drove me," says Gentles. With the help of business partners Zawadi Bryant and Consuelo Cazares, the 40-year-old opened the Sugar Land, Texas-based Night Light After Hours Pediatrics facility (www.nightlightpediatrics.com) in March 2007.

Since opening its doors, the pediatric urgent care center has seen revenues of nearly \$100,000, says Gentles, who serves as CEO and medical director of the clinic. The team used almost \$250,000 of its own startup money, plus loans and donations from family members, to turn its vision into reality.

By providing operating hours from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 12 noon to 7:00 p.m. on weekends and holidays, Gentles and her partners offer an alternative to parents who prefer the comfort of the urgent care center to an often busy and impersonal emergency room.

According to Dr. David Stern, CEO of Practice Velocity Urgent Care Solutions (www.practicevelocity.com), a Belvidere, Illinois-based medical software company, urgent care centers differ from standard emergency rooms in key ways. He says such centers are normally not located in hospitals, and they deal with sicknesses and injuries that need timely treatment but are not life threatening. Like other medical practices, Night Light Pediatrics accepts most major private insurance plans; individuals without insurance must pay a discounted fee before receiving treatment.

Gentles projects that revenues will grow approximately 100% to 150% every year for the next three years as the facility becomes more established in the area as a provider of after-hours pediatric urgent care. "We are open at night, weekends, and holidays," says Gentles, and because of this the clinic's greatest expenses are personnel-related. They keep expenses low by paying partners on a graduated scale based on revenues; by investing in electronic records, faxes, and e-mails to keep the processes "paperless;" and by outsourcing support services such as graphic design and technical support. Looking toward the future, the team plans to open three additional locations within the next five years.

"Our goal is to provide an affordable alternative to expensive emergency room care for parents and their children," says Gentles. "And at the same time, ensure that they receive the same quality care they would from their primary care pediatrician." —Erinn R. Johnson



DR. GENTLES EASES KIDS' AILMENTS AND PARENTS' WORRIES.

Dr. David Stern's experience includes partnerships in 10 urgent care facilities in Oklahoma and Illinois. Here he offers advice to those determined to venture into the sector.

- 1. Research on the front end.** "It is important to speak with someone who has done this before," urges Stern. Also, consider purchasing an existing center. The Urgent Care Association of America (www.ucaoa.org) is a good resource.
- 2. Choose the right location.** The clinic should be in an underserved community of at least 50,000 residents, and the area should have a need for such a facility.
- 3. Select your offerings.** Decide what you will and will not provide. Stern says a common model combines occupational medicine services with walk-in services. In this format, area businesses can send employees in for drug screenings, physical examinations, and other services.
- 4. Know the back office.** "Although you may hire others to oversee this," continues Stern, "the more you learn about coding, billing, and collecting your revenues, the more successful you will be."
- 5. Market early.** Put up a sign as soon as the building is ready. "Newspaper articles are powerful," says Stern, who recommends inviting the press to the grand opening. "It's free advertising."

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Night  Light
PEDIATRIC URGENT CARE