

County of Santa Clara
Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System
Agency Administration
Information Services




HHS07 092909

Prepared by: Selene Ho
Administrative Services Manager II
Reviewed by: Cheri Silveira Moliere
MISM II
Robert Nakamae
Deputy County Counsel
Submitted by: Dennis Kotecki
Chief Information Officer

DATE: September 29, 2009

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: 
Kim Roberts
SCVHHS - Chief Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Various Actions Relating to Agreement with ExpressBill, LLC for Patient Appointment Reminder Mailing Services

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Consider recommendations relating to patient appointment reminder mailing services.

Possible action:

- a. Authorize payment to ExpressBill, LLC for services rendered from October 1, 2008 through July 30, 2009 in the amount of \$171,904.94.
- b. Approve delegation of authority to SCVHHS Chief Executive Officer, or designee, to negotiate, execute, amend, terminate and take any and all necessary or advisable actions

relating to service agreement with ExpressBill, LLC to provide mailing services in an amount not to exceed \$85,000 for period August 1, 2009 through December 31, 2010, following approval by County Counsel as to form and legality, and approval by the Office of the County Executive. Delegation of authority shall expire on December 31, 2010.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no impact to the General Fund as a result of this action. Since the County has not yet paid for the services rendered from October 2008 through July 2009, funding allocated for these expenses is available in the FY10 SCVMC budget to pay for these services under the agreement with GE Healthcare.

CONTRACT HISTORY

There are no prior contracts with ExpressBill, LLC.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

On March 23, 2004, the Board of Supervisors approved implementation of a new patient and resources scheduling system and an agreement with IDX Information Systems, Inc. The company was later acquired by GE Healthcare. The new scheduling system, known as Enterprise Wide Scheduling (EWS) went live on January 31, 2006.

All Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) outpatient clinics use EWS to schedule patient appointments. One of the functionalities of the system is its ability to send patient reminder letters in multiple languages through its mailing services. In October 2008, as a cost reduction measure, the department eliminated appointment reminder letters to primary care clinics, but continued sending the letters to patients in specialty clinics seven days before their scheduled appointment. With the new Valley Specialty Center (VSC) scheduled to open several months later, it was important to continue sending appointment reminder letters for specialty appointments as patients would be unfamiliar with the new facility and the exact location for their appointment.

The mailer request files are processed each night and sent electronically to a secure FTP server. The files are picked up electronically by the vendor and used to create the mailers. A report is monitored each morning by SCVHHS Information Services to reconcile the number of mailer requests picked up and the number of mailers generated.

In addition to sending out appointment reminders via mail, both primary and specialty care clinics use an automated reminder call system. The automated appointment reminder call system, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) unit, launches reminder calls two days in advance of the scheduled appointment informing patients of the date, time and location of their appointment. The information about the appointment is based on data uploaded directly from the scheduling system. The data includes patient name, phone number, language and details of the appointment. It is also scheduled to repeat the calls every several hours until successful contact is made through an answering machine or live person. The reminder calls are generated in 10 different languages. The IVR is a more cost effective method of reminding patients of primary and specialty care clinic appointments.

In early 2009, the SCVHHS Information Services contracts unit noticed an issue with the GE Healthcare invoices and began researching the lack of a mailer services invoice. At that time, GE Healthcare was not responsive to questions regarding the lack of mailer invoices.

Concurrently, Emdeon Business Services (ExpressBill, LLC is the formal legal entity with whom we will contract) began sending invoices to a SCVMC address not included in the GE Healthcare contract and to a contact person no

longer employed with the County. As a result, SCVHHS Finance had difficulty forwarding the invoices to the appropriate department in a timely manner.

In March 2009, SCVHHS Information Services was instructed by GE Healthcare to contact Emdeon Business Services and received preliminary information that Emdeon was now providing the mailer service, but was unclear as to the next steps to resolve this issue. Since the department's contract was with GE Healthcare, the contracts unit attempted to work with GE Healthcare to allow payments to Emdeon to be made through GE Healthcare. This approach was not accepted after several months of discussions.

In June 2009, SCVMC received more detailed information that GE Healthcare, the EWS vendor, had sold its mailing services business to ExpressBill, LLC and the reassignment to ExpressBill, LLC took place in October 2008. SCVMC engaged County Counsel and Procurement immediately upon learning of the reassignment. The department and County Counsel worked together over the next couple of months with ExpressBill, LLC to determine the terms and conditions of the new contract, the exact amount of outstanding invoices and best approach to proceed with mailing services.

Under the terms and conditions of the GE Healthcare agreement for mailing services, GE Healthcare was allowed to sell its mailer services business without written consent from the County. In addition, the contract did not require written notification of the reassignment. As such, the County was unaware that a different vendor was responsible for mailing these appointment reminders as data transfer and programming were not requested from ExpressBill, LLC. The mailing of patient appointment reminder notices went uninterrupted when ExpressBill, LLC took over this function from GE Healthcare.

Efforts were made to resolve the contract matter quickly, but due to the problem discovery, resolution planning, internal discussions and vendor negotiations, the efforts have taken longer than anticipated. This item was listed as a Pending Board Item on the August 19 Health and Hospital Committee agenda, prior to bringing it forward to the Board for approval.

County Counsel was actively involved in the communication with the department and vendor, and provided direction to the department on course of action needed to pay the vendor and contract terms to include in the new agreement with ExpressBill, LLC. County Counsel also advised that for future agreements, the department will request language that would require the County to receive notice of all mergers and sales and to require the contractor to assist the County during the transition to the new vendor.

It is important to note that when the reassignment took place, ExpressBill, LLC was bound by the original terms and conditions of the GE Healthcare agreement. The terms and conditions include Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) provisions and Business Associate language which provides protection on the use and disclosure of protected health information (PHI) in many circumstances. To date, ExpressBill, LLC has met the terms and conditions of the GE Healthcare contract and has successfully fulfilled its contractual mailing obligations.

Since ExpressBill, LLC has been providing the mailing services, payment to the vendor is necessary to compensate for services rendered from October 2008 through July 2009. In addition, delegation of authority is requested to execute an agreement and subsequent amendments with ExpressBill, LLC to continue the letter mailing services through December 31, 2010 while the department fully transitions the patient appointment reminder letters to automated reminder calls only. The contract will expire on December 31, 2010 or earlier once it has been communicated with the various specialty departments regarding ending the appointment reminder mailers as well as allowing sufficient time for the vendor to turn off the data interface. The requested contract amount of \$85,000 will be sufficient during this transition period.

BACKGROUND

Many scheduling functionalities exist in the EWS system that provides for more flexibility in scheduling and rescheduling patient appointments as well as greater efficiency in managing provider schedules. All patient appointments scheduled throughout the Ambulatory setting are available for viewing which allows for better coordination of patient care. The system also has extensive reporting capabilities to provide management and clinic staff with tools to determine patient wait times, capture appointment availability and assess changes in patient volume to better manage provider schedules.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

Failure to approve the recommended action may impact the department's ability to provide payment to the vendor for appointment reminder letter mailing services.