Patients of Family Practice of Holyoke may soon notice their billing statements have a new look. Since June 1, the rural health clinic has been using First Party Receivables out of Greeley to handle its self-pay billing.

East Phillips County Hospital District has been using First Party Receivables to handle its self-pay receivables at Melissa Memorial Hospital since 2006, and recently made the decision to standardize its billing operations by making the switch at the clinic as well.

“It was done for consistency and efficiency,” said EPCHD administrator John Ayoub. “We’ve been using First Party at the hospital for two-and-a-half years now and they’ve done a good job.”

He added, “They will do the job more efficiently, effectively and cheaper than we can, which keeps costs down for our patients. We believe by making the switch we are providing a better product for patients in the community.”

First Party Receivables is not a collection agency, said Ayoub. Rather, it is an extension of the hospital’s business office that specifically deals with informing and working with patients on their self-pay accounts.

According to business office manager Julie Vernon, the new clinic billing statements will look the same as the hospital statements, but they will still be two separate accounts. Added Ayoub, though MMH and Family Practice are part of the same district and are now located in the same facility, for Medicare purposes they are still considered two separate business entities and patients still have to check into each one they visit, even if it’s on the same day.

One of the perks of switching self-pay billing at the clinic to FPR, said Vernon, is many customers will already be familiar with how to read their statements because of the hospital; however, patients are urged to double-check whether their bills came from the clinic or hospital, as they will now look similar and be easier to mix up.

The billing process works like this: if a patient has insurance, a claim for payment will be made to the insurance company first. Once the company pays or denies payment, the bill will be sent to FPR the following day, who will then send a statement to the patient.

Payment plans can then be established with either FPR or the hospital district’s business office. If no contact is made by the patient within a few days, FPR will make a follow-up phone call. Follow-ups will also be made on late payments, however no further contact is needed if the customer pays on time.

With FPR, patients will not be charged interest if they set up a plan to pay off their bills within one year. This is a huge benefit for clinic patients as, prior to the switch, the payment had to be made within 30 days for the client to not be charged interest.

A phone number for First Party Receivables will be provided on statements for patients who have questions about their bills. However, Vernon and Ayoub noted they also are still available to people who have questions regarding their bills.