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2008 look ahead

Volunteers in Medicine looking for more

Low-income clinic already sees need for more space, expansion of services in new year

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Volunteers in Medicine officials have some lofty goals for the free health care clinic in the new year.

They want to qualify more people in Monroe and Owen counties for ongoing care, expand the clinic's facility, recruit and train more volunteers, start several support groups, and continue fundraising for operational expenses and for the beginnings of an endowment.

"We have qualified about 2,000 people so far, which is only about 15 percent of the number of people in Monroe and Owen counties who we feel could qualify for services," said Winston Shindell, VIM's interim board president. "We will be actively pursuing the remaining 85 percent."

Elizabeth Sturgeon, the clinic's executive director, said that outreach effort will be made by reaching out to local social service agencies, schools and churches; and by working with the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce to identify and notify small businesses that don't provide health insurance for their employees about the VIM clinic.

More space

Shindell said the clinic, which opened last April, hopes to add some space at its current location at 333 E. Miller Drive to better serve its clients and to add some services.

"Our growth and improvement in services will be severely limited without additional space," he said. "We'll be working closely with Bloomington Hospital and hopefully be able to find some additional space within the next six months. If that can't be worked out, we will try to add some more space elsewhere."

Shindell said the on-site dental clinic — where there is a six-month waiting list for patients — is a top priority for expansion.

"Right now we have one dental chair," he said. "We really need more space and more equipment; as well as more volunteer dentists and dental hygienists willing to work on-site so patients can come here for one-stop shopping."

Three to five years down the road, Shindell said, the clinic hopes to have a new home — either a newly constructed facility somewhere or a refurbished building.

“We are thankful for what we do have on Miller Drive, and it’s serving its purpose very well,” he said. “But it would be wonderful to eventually have our own building specifically designed for what we want to do.”

Fundraising

Shindell said charitable contributions and grant funding have put the clinic “well on its way” toward having the \$2.3 million needed to cover its operating expenses for the first three years.

“After we reach that goal, we hope to establish and operate an endowment through the Bloomington Hospital Foundation,” he said. “We could use the endowment earnings to supplement our ongoing operating expenses.”

Last summer, the Volunteers in Medicine clinic was designated as a United Way agency.

“That was very important for us,” he said. “It’s like getting the Good Housekeeping seal of approval.”

Support groups

Over the next few months, Shindell said, the clinic plans to begin offering three support groups — dealing with smoking cessation, pain management, and stress and mood management.

Volunteers

Shindell said while the clinic is being buoyed by more than 800 professional and lay volunteers, more are needed — particularly nurses.

“Over the next six months, we will continue to recruit and train volunteers,” he said. “The most serious shortage is in our nursing ranks, which is creating some overscheduling of the volunteer nurses we do have.”

Sturgeon said the clinic has about 160 nurse volunteers, but that many of them can give of their time only sporadically.

“Many days we have no nurse volunteers at all,” she said. “We’d like to have at least 60 more.”

Other types of volunteers still needed are EMTs, paramedics, certified nursing assistants, nurse techs and counselors for the behavioral and mental health program.

Interested volunteers should send an e-mail to info@vimmonroecounty.org; or call 353-3201.

Healthy Indiana Plan

Shindell said the clinic hopes to soon partner with Bloomington Hospital to become a contact point for those wishing to complete and submit applications to become part of Gov. Mitch Daniels’ Healthy

Indiana Plan.

The Family and Social Services Administration hopes to enroll up to 130,000 people in the program, which — beginning Jan. 1 — will benefit low-income adults who have no health insurance.

The plan is available to uninsured adults ages 18-64 in households earning up to twice the federal poverty level — a sliding scale that varies from \$20,420 for a single individual to \$41,300 for a family of four.

“Because we’re serving the same population as the Healthy Indiana Plan, we thought it made sense for the clinic to be a point of contact,” he said.

The clinic

The clinic, brainchild of retired Bloomington surgeon Rajih Haddawi, opened April 23 to help meet the medical needs of an estimated 12,000 individuals in Monroe and Owen counties who are uninsured and can’t afford health insurance. The clinic sees patients by appointment and on a walk-in basis. Those seeking medical care for chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure or diabetes, must go through a prequalification process at the clinic.

THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

- Interviewed an average of 17 patients a day to determine eligibility for services.
- Certified 1,993 patients for services.
- Made 6,622 patient appointments.
- Received 11,907 hours of service from medical and lay volunteers.
- Filled 15,267 prescriptions.
- Referred approximately 650 patients to specialists outside the clinic.
- Saw 1,495 patients in November, the highest number since it opened last April.
- The No. 1 reason for referrals is for optometry services, followed by dental services.
- Added specialty clinics in orthopedics, physical therapy, urology, neurology and podiatry.
- The top three diagnoses at the clinic are heart-related issues, diabetes, and anxiety or depression.
- In terms of patient volume and number of services offered, the clinic is one of the largest VIM clinics in the country.



Volunteers In Medicine clinic on Miller Drive shares a building with Bloomington Hospital's health services divisions. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

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