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Grateful patients flock to free clinic

'The people here treat you with dignity,' woman says on first day

By Dann Denny
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Lisa Stidd was on her honeymoon — checking out of the Holiday Inn Express in Bloomington Sunday morning — when a copy of The Herald-Times caught her eye.

On the front page was a story about the new Volunteers in Medicine free medical clinic that opened Monday.

“I told my husband we needed to buy a copy,” she said. “When I started reading it, I began to cry. I said, ‘What a blessing!’”

At 10 a.m. Monday, Stidd was one of about 15 people in the waiting room of the new clinic, which provides free health care and low-cost medications to low-income residents of Monroe and Owen counties who do not have health insurance.

Some people were there to see doctors or nurses about medical problems or prescription medications.

Others were there with paperwork in hand, waiting for appointments that would determine whether they qualified for free care.

Neither Stidd nor her disabled husband, James, have health insurance. Stidd, who works as a part-time cashier and cook at Backstreet Missions, makes \$8 an hour.

“I’m highly allergic to anything with pine — pine trees, pine cleaners, pine candles,” she said. “I’ve had six allergic attacks in the last week. Friday, I had to go to the emergency room.”

During an allergic reaction, said Stidd, her skin turns bright red and her throat swells — making breathing difficult.

“It’s scary,” she said. “There have been times when I was sure I was going to suffocate and die.”

Stidd said the three prescription medications she needs to keep her allergic reactions in check cost about \$200 a month.

“I also have a herniated disc in my neck, and the pain medication for that runs about \$150 a month,” she said. “I spend more than half my income on medications.”

Monday, as she waited for her name to be called, Stidd said she was hopeful. At the clinic, medications cost only \$3 each.

“If this place can help me, I can’t tell you what a blessing that would be,” she said.

Ruby Smith, a 62-year-old Bloomington woman, was hoping a doctor could fill a prescription for high blood pressure medication and check her broken left knee.

“Last February, I fell on some black ice and broke my knee,” she said. “It now has screws and wires in it.”

Smith works as a custodian, cleaning medical offices. She has no health insurance. But she has not allowed her sore knee to force her to stop working.

“I wear a brace on it, but it still swells up,” she said. “When I get home I put ice on it.”

Smith said the clinic is a godsend.

“There are so many people like me who have no insurance, who can benefit from a place like this,” she said. “And the people here treat you with dignity.”

Jo Ellen Taylor, a 40-something Gosport resident, sat in the waiting room holding a folder filled with paperwork.

“They’re going to see whether I qualify for free care,” she said. “I’m really hoping I do.”

Taylor has degenerative joint disease in her neck, but still manages to take care of her elderly parents and her 3-year-old granddaughter.

“My husband works for the Owen County Highway Department,” she said. “But he can’t afford their health insurance.”

Taylor spends about \$200 a month on doctors’ visits and medication for high blood pressure and neck pain.

“If I qualify, it would mean a lot less pain and stress for me,” she said. “It would also mean I could use more of our income to take care of my parents and granddaughter.”

Volunteers still needed

Loraine Addison, the VIM clinic’s director of volunteer services, said the clinic still needs registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and nurse assistants.

Mental health providers are also needed — including social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Also needed are volunteers to help complete paperwork and wait on patients in the pharmacy.

Addison said it is difficult to estimate how many more volunteers are needed, but she said there are more open time slots for volunteers during the day than evening hours, and that volunteers are particularly needed for the Friday afternoon slot.

Addison said ideally, a volunteer can work a shift every week or every other week to provide continuity of care in the clinic.

A minimum commitment of six hours per month is required. Shifts are 3 to 5 hours in length. Call 353-3533 to volunteer.



Ruby Smith waits for a prescription to be filled at the Volunteers in Medicine clinic Monday in Bloomington. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

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