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Doctor sees important role for clinic in managing ongoing health problems

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The medical director of the new Volunteers in Medicine clinic scheduled to open this April says one of the clinic's greatest strengths will be managing peoples' chronic conditions — such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

Dr. Eric Bannec, the clinic's medical director and an internist for the past 12 years with Bloomington's Internal Medicine Associates, said he sees many people with chronic illness who have to make a choice between getting health- care and putting food on the table for their families.

“As a result, their medical conditions go untreated and worsen until they become catastrophic,” he said in a prepared statement. “It's a very destructive process.”

If diabetes is not treated, Bannec said, the disease can cause significant complications within just three years, resulting in decreased quality of life and work productivity and thousands of dollars in medical bills.

“With ongoing medical care to treat and control the disease, a diabetic can delay catastrophic complications by 15 years or more,” he said.

Bannec said the cost of treating a diabetic patient in the new clinic will be about \$160 per year compared to the national average of \$2,400 per year.

He said the clinic will be able to minimize operating costs by relying on medical and lay volunteers, Bloomington Hospital, financial support from the community and assistance programs through pharmaceutical companies.

Through these pharmaceutical assistance programs, Bannec said, the new clinic will be able to obtain medications without charge.

When needed, medications for acute and chronic illnesses will be prescribed and dispensed to clinic patients, who will be responsible for a small handling fee of \$3 for each medication — with a maximum charge of \$10 per visit.

The clinic, scheduled to open April 23, will provide primary and preventive healthcare, dental care, vision care, medications, health education and diagnostic testing for both acute and chronic illnesses.

The clinic will be at 333 E. Miller Drive in the space that houses Bloomington Hospital's CHAP clinic.

It will serve 16,000 residents in Monroe and Owen counties who lack health insurance and the ability to pay for medical care.

"Access to quality care and patient education is critical to improving individual health and the health of our community, both physically and financially," Bannec said.

The community-operated, community-owned and community-financed clinic is modeled after a national program with a history of success in other communities around the country.

For more information or to volunteer for the Volunteers in Medicine clinic, visit www.VIMMonroeCounty.org online or send e-mail to info@VIMMonroeCounty.org.

To make a donation to the clinic, call the Bloomington Hospital Foundation at 353-9528.

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