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Our opinion

New free clinic a big deal for community

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Friday afternoon in Bloomington would rate an A-plus. The sky was its prettiest blue; the temperature was a perfect 70 degrees; the sun shined brightly — and the Volunteers in Medicine Clinic of Monroe County had its ceremonial opening.

Make no mistake: The VIM clinic is a really big deal.

The clinic, which will start taking patients Monday, will provide free access to high quality health care for 16,000 Monroe and Owen county residents — 3,000 of them children — who don't have and can't afford health insurance.

This is a local solution to a national problem; 47 million Americans are uninsured.

“This is medical negligence, clearly harmful,” said Dr. Eric Bannec, medical director of the new clinic, after quoting the “First, do no harm” credo of physicians.

More than 300 members of the medical community have volunteered to treat patients at the clinic. They have been led by Dr. Rajih Haddawi, the man whose vision, persistence, focus, passion and powers of persuasion have championed this project the last 16 months.

Joining hands with the medical professionals are officials from Bloomington Hospital — which has donated a facility, staff members and all sorts of support — and the community at large, from which thousands of volunteer hours and \$1.3 million in funding have been pledged.

This red-letter day does not end the efforts to provide health care to the uninsured. It was, rather, a starting point that will see more hurdles to overcome. A first one, Bannec said after Friday's ceremony, is the need for more volunteer nurses — RNs and LPNs — and medical assistants to help with intake procedures such as taking blood pressure, recording heart rates and gathering other vital information.

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