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VIM clinic's new home wins praise on first day

New facility for free medical clinic pleases patients, volunteers

By Dann Denny
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Business was brisk Monday morning at the Volunteers in Medicine clinic, which opened at 8 a.m. in a newly refurbished facility at 811 W. Second St.

Shelley Sallee, VIM's volunteer coordinator, was a veritable ringmaster at the front desk — answering the phone, pulling files and checking in patients — along with a team of volunteers.

“Things are going quite smoothly so far,” Sallee said at 9:30 am. “We’ve had 15 walk-ins already, plus the scheduled patients.”

Elizabeth Sturgeon, VIM's executive director, said she was not surprised by the high volume of patients, partially because the former clinic on East Miller Drive was closed last week so equipment could be moved to the new location.

“So far it's been much busier than a typical Monday,” she said. “But things are going well.”

Sallee said the new facility will “make things much easier because we have more space and we'll be able to see more patients.”

Sturgeon said the 5,250-square-foot building — 1,250 square feet larger than the Miller Drive clinic — will enable the volunteers to see 100 patients a day, 15 more than were seen each day at the former location.

In the carpeted waiting room, which has a TV and plenty of sunlight streaming through three large windows, 20 people were sitting on cushioned chairs.

One of them was 51-year-old Cindy Lou, who had just seen dentist Dick Leyda for a toothache and was waiting to see a doctor.

“This place is very nice,” she said. “The dental room was very comfortable and roomy. The dental room in the old clinic was quite cramped.”

Lou, who's used the VIM clinic since it opened in April 2007, said it's “nice to finally have our own place, and we can now park a lot closer to the building.”

Sallee, who oversees more than 600 volunteers, said each week the clinic is served by 150 lay volunteers and 15 to 20 volunteer physicians, dentists and behavioral health specialists.

“We are blessed to have so many volunteers,” she said. “It’s a great reflection on our community.”

In one of the eight exam rooms — two more than the old facility — physician Peter Wallskog was giving Terri Inskip a physical.

“It’s a beautiful new clinic with a lot more room,” said Inskip. “I spent only five minutes in the waiting room. I used to wait 40 minutes at the old place.”

“The doctors here are good and thorough and friendly. They don’t make you feel like a poor slob,” said Inskip, who explained she cannot afford to buy health insurance through her employer.

Wallskog and another physician, Dwain Illman, said the exam rooms are larger and equipped with more standardized medical equipment, such as otoscopes (instruments that examine the ears) and ophthalmoscopes (instruments that examine the eyes) than those in the old clinic.

“This is a terrific facility that is more functional than the old one,” Illman said. “The exam rooms are set up like real doctors’ offices.”

Leyda was seeing patients in one of the two dental rooms, one more than the old facility had. Each room has a dental chair and exam table, and one of them has an X-ray machine.

Leyda had 12 scheduled patients Monday, and he’d already seen two walk-in patients by 9:30 a.m.

“We have a volunteer dental hygienist who will start this week,” Sturgeon said. “She will do cleanings and X-rays.”

The clinic facility, which is being leased from Cook Medical for \$1 a year, provides free medical and mental health care to low-income uninsured residents of Monroe and Owen counties.

During its first year of operation, the clinic provided services to more than 4,000 patients. The facility had 20,000 patients visits and dispensed more than 30,000 prescriptions.

From October 2007 to Sept. 31, 2008, the clinic provided medical services amounting to \$576,378.



Dr. Peter Wallskog examines Terri Inskip during a physical at the VIM clinic Monday morning. Dann Denny | Herald-Times

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