

OUR OPINION

Volunteers help uninsured receive medical treatment

The Herald-Times

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Since 2007, the Volunteers in Medicine clinic has provided free medical care to low-income Monroe and Owen county residents who have no health insurance. Physicians and nurse practitioners in both primary care and specialties donate their time and skills to treat people who would otherwise have no access to health care. Some providers staff the clinic on-site, while others treat patients at their own offices. It's a remarkable concept, and our community has been fortunate to have so many practitioners willing to help.

Unfortunately, the number of primary care physicians serving the clinic has dropped from 63 in 2007 to 28 in 2009. Whether it's the economy, the income disparity between family practitioners and specialists, the lack of retirees available to serve or the overall shortage of primary care physicians, access to primary care — which can lead to better prevention and health management — can be a challenge for the uninsured.

But the good news is that the VIM clinic is now offering treatment in several specialty areas both on-site and at physician offices. Last year, about \$1.2 million in speciality care was provided free of charge to VIM patients, and a total of 3,130 referrals to specialists were made.

Until our broken health care reimbursement system is fixed so that everyone who needs insurance can get it, we will be reliant upon the good deeds of physicians and nurse practitioners such as the VIM volunteers, who donate their valuable services so that people receive the care they need.

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Randy Franklin had a cancerous growth removed from his hand by a Volunteers In Medicine specialist. Skin was grafted to help repair the damage, and it has now healed. David Snodgress | Herald-Times



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