

## Volunteers in Medicine seeing more patients

Fewer primary care practitioners at free medical clinic, but more specialists

By Dann Denny

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Since its inception in 2007, the Volunteers in Medicine clinic has seen its number of monthly patients grow from 709 to 821, and its number of volunteer specialists climb from 225 to 251.

The clinic, which provides free medical care to low-income, uninsured residents of Monroe and Owen counties, has added four specialties — chiropractic, speech and hearing, acupuncture and naturopathy (the treatment of diseases without drugs).

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It's also added six on-site clinics — acupuncture, mental and behavioral health, diabetes, neurology, pain group and spine.

But on the flip side, the clinic has seen its number of primary care doctors and nurse practitioners fall from 63 in 2007 to 28 in 2009, and has lost one specialty practice — Summit Urology. Summit Urology was contacted for this story but had no comment.

"We realize we don't have a large base of retired primary care providers in the community who can volunteer at VIM, and that most of the primary care providers we started out with are working full time," said Elizabeth Sturgeon, VIM's executive director. "We also knew that the initial opening of the clinic generated excitement among providers who signed on to volunteer, but found that their specific skills didn't fit well in a clinic setting."

### **Specialists**

Sturgeon said in 2009, Bloomington specialists provided about \$1.2 million in free medical care to patients referred to them by VIM.

Those specialists saw VIM patients in their offices at no charge. For procedures they perform, they can charge 20 percent of what Medicaid reimburses, up to \$100 — though Bloomington Hospital and many specialists waive these fees.

In 2009, VIM made 3,130 referrals to specialists — including 1,562 to Bloomington Hospital's emergency department, 380 to local dentists and 217 to local optometrists.

When asked about the growth in the number of specialists, VIM board president Jim Gardner said, "It's amazing. They are under no obligation to see VIM patients. They are busy and struggling with their practices, but still find time to take care of our patients."

Dr. Jitender Bhandari of Internal Medicine Associates said VIM has relieved some of the load from the emergency rooms of the two local hospitals.

"Hopefully, there will be increased participation by the local medical community to share the burden of this honorable cause, so that more patients can get the medical help they need," he said.

Neither Gardner nor Sturgeon wish to point the finger at Summit Urology, which Sturgeon, when directly asked, said no longer sees VIM patients in its offices for free as it once did.

“When the urologists are on call at Bloomington Hospital they will see uninsured patients for free there, and their practice may also have an internal system in place for helping those in financial need,” she said. “But they do not see VIM patients in their offices at no charge.”

Gardner said just because physicians do not see VIM patients for free does not mean they are not conducting charity work in other ways, such as doing medical missions work overseas.

### **Why fewer family docs?**

Sturgeon said some of the family doctors who no longer volunteer at VIM found it difficult to take time away from their practices, and others have simply moved away or retired.

“There are several primary care providers new to the area that we have not approached about volunteering, so there is an opportunity to increase the number of primary care volunteers,” she said. “The most important thing we can show is that we are meeting the primary care needs of the patients we have. The number of shifts we fill for primary care has kept pace with the demand, which has increased.”

Dr. Rob Stone, a Bloomington Hospital emergency room physician who volunteers an afternoon at the clinic each month, said the decline in the number of primary care doctors at VIM may stem from the fact that they are generally paid less than specialists.

“Our health care reimbursement system tends to pay people who do procedures, the specialists, a lot more than people who do the general managing of patients, the primary care doctors,” he said. “That’s not completely wrong-headed, because in general the specialists have one to five more years of training, and if you have those extra skills you should be paid more.”

But Stone said there is a broad consensus in the medical community that the income disparity between specialists and family doctors has grown too large. He said today a person fresh out of medical school can make \$140,000 as a family physician, but \$240,000 as an anesthesiologist or orthopedic surgeon.

“On top of that, the specialist’s salary has a chance to rise much faster than the primary care doctor’s,” he said. “The primary care doctors (family doctors) are clearly underpaid.”

### **Why volunteer?**

The 14 pediatricians and five pediatric nurse practitioners at Southern Indiana Pediatrics see any child referred to them by the VIM clinic for free.

“To live out our values, we decided that rather than having a pediatrician at the VIM clinic full time, we’d open our offices at our four locations to any child VIM sends to us,” said Sandy DeWeese, administrator at Southern Indiana Pediatrics, where more than 40 percent of the patients are on Medicaid. “We feel strongly that all children should have access to the same level of pediatric care.”

Dr. Paul Johnson of ENT Associates of Southern Indiana, another speciality group that sees VIM patients for free in its offices, said, “I think we have a duty to give back to this community. It’s been rewarding to help individuals who normally would not have been able to get help.”

Stone, who served as the medical director of VIM’s predecessor — the Community Health Access Program — said he finds it satisfying to help VIM patients, such as the man he recently saw who had chronic inflammation of his colon or the woman who had high blood pressure and chronic back pain.

“There certainly is a selfish and individual streak in American thought today, but also a sense that we need to take care of each other,” he said. “I’m among those who feel a lot of compassion for people who have not had all the advantages I’ve had, particularly when it comes to health care.”

Stone, a strong advocate for universal health care for all Americans, said he hopes to ultimately put the VIM clinic out of business.

“I wish we didn’t have to beg people for money to help keep the clinic going,” he said. “I’d rather see the whole nation be responsible for providing health care for everyone.”

## Volunteers in Medicine practitioners

### **PRIMARY CARE (all on-site)**

Elizabeth Anderson, Eric Bannec, Brad Bomba Jr., Brad Bomba Sr., Mike Burns, Rebecca Cohen, Jean Creek, Russell Dukes, Kay Fields, Tom Hrisomalos, Melissa Hullinger, Dwain Illman, James Johnson, Caitilin Kelly, Judith Klein, Priya Kumar, Susan Lee, Nancy Macklin, Mary Mahern, Lee McKinley, Wesley Ratliff, James Ray, Jill Smith, Robert Stone, Dee Swanson, Garry Tinnis, Jacqueline Trueblood, Peter Wallskog.

### **ON-SITE SPECIALISTS**

Acupuncture — Sarah Frederickson, Jennifer Meador-Stone, Judy Summerville, Danielle Toner.

Dentists — Tony Kenworthy, Robert Rimstedt, Robin Roberts

Gynecology — William Anderson, Rebecca Brewer, Joan Goodman, Elizabeth Sabga, Susan Shick, Rhonda Trippel, Laura VanDoren.

Mental/Behavioral Health — Karen Knight, Eva Lenard, Valerie Markley, Janis Neff, Carlene Quinn, Michael Tracy, Barbara Walker.

Neurology — Jamie Bales, Amartyadeb Goswami, Brian Moore, Alan Somers.

Orthopedics — Raj Haddawi, John Hammerstein, Kent Moseman, James Rickert.

Physiatry — Earl Craig, Lisa Holmes, Paul Kern, Todd Rowland.

Psychiatry — Perry Griffith, Johan Verhulst.

### **OFF-SITE SPECIALISTS**

Allergy and immunology — Emma McCormack, Daniel McCormack, Rajan Mehta.

Anesthesiology — Daniel Bonham, Larry Bowling, Lacey Brown, William Campbell, Bracken DeWitt, Tim Dunfee, Allen Dunn, James Fish, Mark Floyd, Janet Fritsch, Gary Gettelfinger, Kevin Gibbs, Jeffrey Jackson, John Jesseph, Chad Johnson, Aaron Leis, Rob Lindsey, Plato Lysandrou, George Penneff, Frank Shahbahrami, Layne Tait, Beatrice Travis, David Willian, Yuri Zelenin.

Cardiology — Annette Alpert, Louis Calli, James Faris, James Fix, Carter Henrich, Gregory Heumann, Jennifer Petersen, Larry Rink, Jill Smith, John Strobel, Greg Sutliff.

Chiropractic — Dallas Drummond, Norman Houze, Travis Hulbert, Craig Morrow, Greg Morrow, Branden Osmon, Jameson Russell.

Cardiothoracic surgery — David Hart and Deon Vigilance.

Dermatology — David Byrne, William Cron, Carrie Davis, Kathleen McTigue, Matthew Reeck.

Emergency Department — Robert Adams, Timothy Burrell, Christina Cabott, Wendy Conger, Richard Flint, William Johnson, Thomas Madden, Haewon Park, John Ray, Corinna Repetto, Owen Slaughter, Robert Stone, Eric Telfer, Andrew Watters, Judith Wright.

Endocrinology — Phillip Behn, Eric Orth.

Endodontists - Allen Meier, Joseph Spires.

Gastroenterology — Jitender Bhandari, Prody Ghosh, Amar Pinto, Daniel Selo, James Touloukian, Richard Weddle.

General Dentistry — Jeffrey Allen, Gary Bishop, Gene Brewer, Elaine Coghlan, David Compton, Luke Eades, Alejandra Haddad, Karen Hrisomalos, Kelly Jastremski, Thomas Kapczynski, W.D. Kenfield, Michael King, Barbara LaNere-Heck, David Lawler, Allen Linnemeier, Marc Meadows, Steve Pritchard, Gavin Rothrack, Marc Smith, Tod Stipp, Mark Sutor (periodontist), Rhett Tharp, Stephen Trager, Thomas Watkins, Todd Whitlock.

General Surgery — Southern Indiana Surgery Center, Terry Greer, Fadi Haddad, Jerry Jesseph, Charles McKeen, Brad Ray.

Hospitalists — Jared Fialkow, Lee McKinley, Ashish Patel, Michele Spolyar, Gary Tinnes.

Internal Medicine — Beth Florini, Freij Gobal, Priya Kumar, Wes Ratliff, Gregory Sutliff.

Mental/Behavioral Health — Centerstone, Ron Thompson, Robert Sherman, Caryoln Gould, Ron Masters, Jan Taylor-Schultz.

Naturopath — Akasha Shyamm.

Nephrology — Richard Combs, Teresa Travis.

Neurology — Jameson Way.

Neurosurgery — Souheil Haddad, Marshall Poor Jr.

OB/Gyn — Elizabeth Birch, Judson Brewer, Rebecca Brewer, Clark Brittain, Brian Cook, Wendy Corning, Philip Croke, John Labban, Brandt Ludlow, Liz McDaniel, Elizabeth Sabga, Michael Stowell, Rhonda Trippel, Lisa Weiler, Lillette Wood, Melissa Watters, Robert Wrenn.

Oncology/Hematology — Bloomington Hospital Radiation Oncology Center, Mark Dayton, David Joyce, Jacqueline Joyce, Karuna Koneru.

Ophthalmology — Harold Cohen, Matthew Fornefeld, Kenneth Tewel.

Optometry — Indiana University School of Optometry, Valerie Allen, Brandy Deckard, Denise Howard, Angela Long, Jerrod Long.

Oral Surgery — David Adams, David Howell, Tim Pliske, Scott Tate.

Orthopedics — Mark Hansen, Andy Hipskind, Kevin Kathman, Aaron Mast, Otto Wickstrom, Tim Steiner, Jonathan Surdam, Erich Weidenbender.

Otolaryngology — Paul Johnson, Larry McBride, Jesse Philips, Bill Pugh, J.R. Sarpa.

Pain Management — Gary Gettlefinger, Plato Lysandrou.

Pathology — Mark Bauman, Marcia Campbell, Dan Lodge-Rigal, Eric Stevens.

Pediatric Dentistry- Keith Roberts, Kyle Taylor.

Pediatrics- David C. Esarey, Heather M. Franklin, James J. Laughlin, Richard K. Malone, Debra K. McDaniel, Scot B. Moore, Jason Simmonds, Amy Simpson.

Plastic Surgery — William Weber.

Podiatry — Mike Hoffman, Kenneth Oglesby.

Psychiatry — Joel Griffith, Anne Leach, Carey Mayer, Jerry Neff, Chad Schulteis, Michael Wenzler.

Pulmonary — Russ Dukes, Eric Trueblood, Wes Ratliff.

Radiology — Neal Abdullah, Mark Bisesi, Philip Doering, Sean Flynn, Douglas Geiger, Suzanne Hand, Chris McGary, Ted Megremis, Bruce Monson, Jonathan Staser, Todd Winkler, George Wolfer.

Rheumatology — Narcissa German, Bill Rusche, Tom Worster.

Speech and Hearing — Indiana University School of Speech and Hearing.

Vascular Surgery — Ricardo Vasquez.

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