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## Volunteers in Medicine's free clinic has seen steady growth in its first 5 years

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Nancy Richman, executive director of Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County. Courtesy photo

Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County, the free medical clinic in Bloomington that today completes its fifth year of operation, has enjoyed steady growth since its inception on April 23, 2007.

From 2007 to 2011, the number of enrollees in the VIM program grew from 3,000 to 8,837, and the value of medical services rendered rose from \$376,267 to \$933,750.

During that same time span, the annual number of medical appointments increased from 5,163 to 9,886, the number of dental appointments grew from 310 to 718, and the number of mental health appointments jumped from 376 to 600. Since opening its doors, the VIM clinic has seen more than 5,500 unique patients.

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From 2008, the first full year of VIM's operation, the number of visits to its on-site medication room rose from 5,338 to 11,235. And from 2009, the year when these data were first collected, to 2011, the value of filled prescriptions at VIM went from \$2.8 million to just under \$4.5 million.

"What the community has done in creating the Volunteers in Medicine free clinic is amazing," said Nancy Richman, executive director of VIM, which provides free health care and low-cost prescription medications to low-income, uninsured residents of Monroe and Owen counties. "It is impressive that the community continues its commitment to accessible, high-quality prevention and primary care services through VIM."

Richman, who took the clinic's reins in February, said she is not surprised that VIM has grown so quickly over the past five years, citing research conducted by Indiana University SPEA graduate students in 2006 showing that 16 to 18 percent of Monroe County adults and 15 percent of Owen County adults were uninsured. Based on the Kaiser Commission estimates that about two-thirds of uninsured Americans have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level — \$46,100 for a family of four — Richman said more than 17,000 adults in Monroe and Owen counties meet VIM's eligibility criteria.

## **Funding**

From 2008, the first full year of VIM's operation, to 2011, the annual budget grew from \$749,000 to about \$790,000, not including in-kind revenue and support.

Richman said VIM's two largest funding sources are the Indiana State Department of Health, which gave VIM \$230,000 last year; and Monroe County government, which supported the clinic with \$200,000 each of the past two years. She said other funding sources have included the city of Bloomington, United Way of Monroe County, individual donors, and grants from the Komen Foundation and Indiana Breast Cancer Awareness Trust.

## **Walk-in clinic**

From 2008 to 2011, the number of visits to VIM's walk-in clinic rose from 2,572 to 2,936.

"We have a partnership with IU Health Bloomington Hospital in which we are seeking to intentionally detour people from the hospital's ER to our walk-in clinic unless it's an emergency," Richman said. "In the past, many people used the ER for their primary care, which was a huge drain on its resources and a very expensive way to provide low acuity services. When non-emergency patients come to our clinic, it allows the ER to devote more of its resources to serious health problems."

## **Changing demographics**

Richman said the demographics of the clinic's population are changing, pointing out that in 2008, 96 percent of VIM's patients were living at 100 percent federal poverty level or below. In 2011, only 63 percent were living at that level.

“We are seeing many more people at 200 percent poverty rather than 100 percent or below, which means we’re seeing more people who are not as poor,” she said. “With the difficult economy, many more of our patients are working poor — individuals that have a slightly higher family income that are seeking assistance to access health care services.”

Richman feels the recession has significantly contributed to the growing demand for VIM’s services.

“With the stagnant economy, not only are homeless and unemployed individuals vulnerable, but with insurance premium increases, many people can no longer afford to keep their families insured,” she said. “Recent research has shown that 56 percent of VIM patients are employed and yet living with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level. The working poor need assistance in order to access medical services for themselves and their families.”

## The future

Richman said some of the clinic’s goals for the future include increasing the number of enrolled patients, adding more dental and behavioral health providers, finding new sources of revenue, expanding electronic medical records, expanding and improving the facility and outside parking, streamlining the eligibility process and gaining additional collaborative support from Indiana University.

“One of my major goals is to put the right volunteer in the right position with the right skills and the right training at the right time,” Richman said. “That will help us do a better job of meeting the needs of our patients.”

Richman said VIM is working with IU Health Bloomington’s “individual solutions department” to make VIM’s eligibility application process as user-friendly as possible, and to help people apply for the Healthy Indiana Plan or Medicaid if they are eligible instead of applying for VIM eligibility.

She said during the first three months of 2012, 303 of the 333 VIM applicants were approved in January, 294 of the 329 applicants were approved in February, and 267 of the 354 applicants were approved in March.

## VIM timeline

Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County highlights, by year:

**2007:** Opened on April 23 at 333 E. Miller Drive.

**2008:** Expanded programs to include podiatry, acupuncture and neurology on-site; expanded preventive care classes in diet, nutrition, exercise, tobacco cessation and diabetes education; partnered with Bloomington Hospital to develop an enrollment process in which the hospital’s Individual Solutions helps VIM patients determine if they are eligible for the Healthy Indiana Plan or Medicaid before applying for enrollment with VIM.

**2009:** Moved to the new site at 811 W. Second St.; increased number of specialists and enhanced services, such as the diabetic and spine clinics; established new, six-week wellness program called "Yes I Can," added half-time nurse practitioner to expand access to walk-in patients, and started the Owen County Clean Teeth Initiative that provided dental education to public school students.

**2010:** Added two fully equipped dental rooms that allowed the expansion of dental services to include X-rays, extractions, fillings and tooth repair; formed partnership with IU Health Bloomington Hospital to decrease emergency department visits from people without emergency conditions; upgraded pharmacy software and hardware; awarded grant to buy scanners to assist with initial emergency medical records.

**2011:** Expanded access to walk-in patients through increased hours for nurse practitioner; began Personal Health Record pilot project for diabetes management; awarded grant to buy 10 new computers and upgrade Microsoft Office software.

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