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## Editorial: Community gem marks five years of providing care to people in need

Our opinion Apr 26, 2012



David Snodgrass | Herald-Times In this H-T file photo, Dr. Raj Haddawi applauds the ribbon ceremony celebrating the opening of the Volunteers In Medicine clinic. Joining is Dr. Eric Bannec, medical director for the clinic.

The fifth anniversary of Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County came this week. The milestone deserves praise as the forward-thinking, compassionate, community-minded success story that it is.

The VIM clinic attacks a national problem in a local way by providing free and/or greatly reduced health care to people who don't have insurance. Local medical providers volunteer their time to treat people of Monroe and Owen counties who are in need.

A catalyst for the clinic was research done in 2006 by Indiana University graduate students in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs showing that 15 to 18 percent of adults in Monroe and Owen counties were uninsured. Dr. Rajih Haddawi spearheaded a drive that resulted in the launch of the clinic on April 23, 2007.

Use of the clinic has continued to grow from that day. The number of enrollees in the program has grown from 3,000 that first year to 8,837 in 2011; the value of medical services rendered has risen from \$376,267 to \$933,750. In all, more than 5,500 unique patients have received services at the clinic.

While that's great, it's estimated that 17,000 people in Monroe and Owen counties currently meet low-income guidelines for using the clinic.

The clinic's role has been even more pronounced because of the recession. Where people at 100 percent of the poverty level were the primary users during the early days, a growing number of patients now are employed, earning 200 percent of the poverty level, but still cannot afford insurance. The clinic is a significant safety net.

"What the community has done in creating the Volunteers in Medicine free clinic is amazing," Nancy Richman, the relatively new executive director of VIM, told the H-T's Dann Denny in a recent interview. "It is impressive that the community continues its commitment to accessible, high-quality prevention and primary care services through VIM."

The commitment was led by people such as Haddawi, and organizations such as major funders IU Health Bloomington Hospital and Cook Group. They, the medical community, and hundreds of volunteers and donors have indeed done impressive work. VIM has helped thousands of people receive basic health care that improved their quality of life. It is a community gem.

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