

VIM's new home almost ready

Clinic to be closed next week, reopen in new location Feb. 23

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February 10, 2009

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If you want to have a guided tour of the new Volunteers in Medicine clinic, scheduled to open Feb. 23 at 811 W. Second St., you may be able to get on the schedule by calling 353-3533 and asking for one.

But you may have to take a number. In recent days Elizabeth Sturgeon, the clinic's executive director, has given separate tours of the 5,250-square-foot, red brick building to a group of local ministers, and representatives from Indiana University, the city of Bloomington, Cook Inc., local media and United Way of Monroe County.

Over the next few days she will give more tours to Bloomington Hospital staff and officials from the county and the community foundation.

"It's been fun," she said. "People are telling us they're thrilled with the building and excited about what this means to the community."

Sturgeon said VIM patients will find the new facility more comfortable and user-friendly than the current building, about half of which is being shared with staff working for Bloomington Hospital's Community Health Services.

"There are so many people coming in and out of our current facility that it causes confusion and creates a more institutional feel," she said. "Our patients will find this new space has a warmer, more relaxed atmosphere, and like the fact that it's a space exclusively for them."

Changes

The new clinic's hours will remain the same as they are now — 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday and Thursday and 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday.

But to facilitate the move, the current clinic will be closed Feb. 16-20 — the week preceding the opening of the new clinic.

"We hate to be closed for a week, but it's unavoidable," Sturgeon said. "We'll have to pack everything up and move it to the new location."

When the clinic reopens, it will have a new number — 333-4001. But the current number — 353-3533 — will remain functional indefinitely, as long as it takes for people to get used to the new number.

Sturgeon said the clinic recently added a volunteer position to answer the phone full-time along with the clinic's appointment scheduler, meaning more callers will speak with a live person rather than a recording.

VIM provides free medical care to low-income, uninsured residents of Monroe and Owen counties.

The new clinic will have eight exam rooms, two more than the current facility, and a reconfigured flow of patients that will enable the clinic's volunteer health care providers to see more patients each day.

"We are seeing about 85 patients a day now, but we expect to average 100 a day in 2009," Sturgeon said.

The rooms

One of the exam rooms — equipped with a table, dental chair and X-ray machine — will be used for physical and dental exams.

“We hope to train dental hygienists to come here to do X-rays of our dental patients,” Sturgeon said. “The patients can then take the X-rays with them when they go to get treatment in the offices of our volunteer dentists in the community.”

The new facility will have two intake/discharge rooms; a break room with a pop machine, tables, microwave and refrigerator; and a conference room for such things as diabetes, tobacco-cessation and exercise classes.

“Anyone in the community who wants to use the conference room for a meeting can give us a call,” Sturgeon said. “It’s a nice space and is equipped with nice audio/visual equipment.”

There is also an area for mental and behavioral health counseling, and a pharmacy area where patients receive prescribed drugs and apply to receive free medications from pharmaceutical companies through the Patient Assistance Program.

“We ask patients for a voluntary handling fee of \$3 per prescription — up to \$9 at one time,” Sturgeon said. “But it’s not required.”

There is also a small lab for testing urine and blood glucose levels, two clinical offices for staff nurses, a room for volunteers to do data entry, a space for volunteers to help patients fill out applications for clinic eligibility, and a room where patients can get EMG (electromyogram) screenings and receive treatment from orthopedic doctors, physical therapists and acupuncturists.



Elizabeth Sturgeon, director of the Volunteers in Medicine clinic, talks to Ed Pritchett of the Pritchett Bros. construction company about some additional remodeling work that needs to be done before the new facility opens. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times



Don Lorenzen, of Pritchett Bros., lines up shelving Monday in the pharmacy area of the new Volunteers in Medicine clinic. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times