

Free Medical for Hard Times



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Dr. Jill Ginsberg, a local physician (left) and Sharetta Butcher, an office and volunteer coordinator, welcome patients to their North by Northeast Community Health Center, a free local health clinic for uninsured patients in need.

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recorded a 25 percent increase in patients from last year and just had their busiest month yet.

"People are scared to be without coverage and of running out of medications, Ginsberg said, explaining how most of the patients the clinic sees need ongoing care and medical monitoring, but cannot afford it.

A 2009 report by the Census Bureau Official shows a spike in the number of Americans without health insurance from 4.3 million - to a record 50.7 million. Oregonians alone, make up over 643,000 of the country's uninsured, with the Multnomah County serving over 62,000 uninsured people last year, according to a recent

report.

As of now, the free walk-in clinic opens every Thursday evening, when volunteer medical staff begins checking in patients at 4:30 p.m. The clinic

fills up until the volunteer doctors arrive at 6 p.m. and treat patients until 9 p.m.

Due to a recent increase in demand for free medical services, the clinic plans to ex-

pand hours to twice a week this coming year, keeping three paid staff and 70 medical health volunteers, including doctors and nurses on the team.

The only qualification for the center's services is that uninsured patients live in one of the following local zip codes: 97211, 97212, 97217, 97227, or 97203.

Visiting patients are able to receive blood pressure screening, adult immunizations, acute care for minor illnesses and injuries, prescription medication, patient education, on-going care for diabetes, social services information and referrals, some specialty consul-

tation, and off-site laboratory services. Not provided are medical services such as STD testing and gynecologic care.

Though there are many Oregon programs working hard to provide uninsured people with low-cost, attainable health insurance, the North by Northeast Community Health Center will continue to do their part in making sure folks are not left to fend for themselves.

"People don't have to give up on their health. We are there to help, and if you have a health issue or know a family member with one, we encourage you to get in touch with us," Dr. Ginsberg says.

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