

Health, hope and humanity

Neighborhood Health Clinic rises to meet Collier County's growing needs

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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Cheryl Young, a longtime clinic volunteer, and Dr. Terrie Mitev, a new volunteer, getting ready to greet and check in patients. NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH CLINIC / COURTESY PHOTOS

“My, how you’ve grown!” I’m speaking of Collier County. I moved here in 1989 when the population was 145,000. Today, more than 418,000 year-round residents call the county home.

Here are some numbers that reflect the health and well-being of some of those residents who are a little less fortunate but still totally enjoy living in our Southwest Florida corner of the world.

A decade ago, a study put the number of the county’s uninsured workers at 50,000 men and women, but that number has grown to 75,000.

Neighborhood Health Clinic, a nonprofit organization, offers comprehensive medical care to those uninsured workers, ages 19 to 64, who work at least 80-plus hours per month and earn at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and are not receiving any government benefits. They’re considered to be low-income, working but uninsured adults.

Given the increase in numbers, the need for the clinic's programs and services is more crucial than ever.



James Hadley, MD, and Karen Sutton, RN, on the clinic campus to provide comprehensive care for patients.

Each year, the clinic provides more than 12,000 patient visits and some 30,000 procedures to patients whose average yearly personal income is around \$22,000.

With a budget of \$3.8 million, Neighborhood Health Clinic is able to provide \$25 million worth of medical care each year by collaborating with a volunteer medical team comprised of 250 physicians, 50 dentists and 100 nurses who are assisted by 300 non-medical volunteers and supported by the clinic's 14 paid full-time staff.

The clinic opened its doors in 1999, and one of the founders, the late Nancy Lascheid, told me in 2017 that "we see every day how we are saving lives."

So, translating the numbers even further into human terms, if you will, the typical patient is a 47-year-old woman (often with dependent children), who is living with three to five chronic conditions. Patients contribute \$10 per month toward overhead which preserves their dignity.

The clinic campus is their medical home for everything from physician-supervised exams and mammograms to lab tests and medications, all in one stop and under one roof and at no cost to patients. The one-stop approach means less time away from work and family.



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“There is an amazing trickle-down effect to health and wellbeing,” said Clinic CEO Keith Maples. “Patients are able to contribute more fully to their families, at work, and in their neighborhoods to civic organizations, improving the quality of their lives and our community. This is hope and healing; this is the extended positive outcome of quality comprehensive care.”

So, where would the uninsured workers of Collier County be if it were not for the services provided by Neighborhood Health Clinic?

“If it weren’t for the clinic, our patients would have nowhere else to turn,” Maples said. “When earning a lower wage, every dollar spent is a decision. Most people will choose to put food, shelter and providing for their children ahead of their own needs. Oftentimes, chronic conditions go untreated.”

Clinic Board Chair Elect and Chief Medical Officer of the Clinic Paul O. Jones, MD, stated, “I didn’t go to medical school to deal with Medicare, Medicaid or forms. I went to help people. I get the opportunity to do that on a regular basis at the clinic.”

A patient responded by saying, “From the minute I walked in, I felt valued and respected. I was treated with love and compassion.”

And then there’s the Lascheid legacy, honoring the late Dr. Bill and Nancy Lascheid, Neighborhood Health Clinic’s founders. Their determination and vision were an amazing gift to Collier County. As Nancy Lascheid said, “The clinic belongs to our community and is here because of our community.” The Lascheids’ insightful mission remains unchanged.

Learn more about the clinic at www.neighborhoodhealthclinic.org. |

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