

## **Center helps uninsured receive care**

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The clinic addresses Ohio's top unmet health-care need: primary dental care.

**YOUNGSTOWN** — Completion of a \$1.5 million renovation and expansion comes just in time to help Youngstown Community Health Center meet the health-care needs of a growing number of under-insured and uninsured residents.

"There is an inverse relationship between us and the economy. As the economy sours, we get busier," said Dr. Ronald Dwinneles, chief executive officer of Ohio North East Health Systems.

During tough economic times, as people lose their incomes and health benefits, they can and do turn to community clinics for primary health care, he said.

YCHA celebrated completion of the two-year project with an open house Tuesday of its expanded dental facility and new pharmacy, which together represent about \$500,000 of the total investment, at its facility on Wick Avenue.

The expansion of services and facilities comes at a time when clinic business is increasing because of the economy, and when plans are being formulated to expand services and facilities throughout the system and into new areas, Dr. Dwinneles said.

Ohio North East Health Systems is the parent company of Youngstown Community Health Center, Warren West Community Health Center and Good Samaritan Community Health Center in Alliance.

Ohio North East is a Federally Qualified Health Center, which means its clinics must be located in medically under-served areas, and that it receives about 30 percent of its budget, which was \$6 million in 2008, through the U.S. Public Health Service. Federally qualified health centers also receive a higher reimbursement rate for treatment of Medicare and Medicaid patients than other health care systems.

Dr. Dwinneles emphasized that Ohio North East's clinics also see patients not on Medicare or Medicaid, and has a sliding fee scale based on federal poverty guidelines for household income.

Youngstown Community Health Clinic is an example of the type of growth that can be experienced during tough economic times, he said.

YCHC was started 25 years ago in 500 square feet of space on Oak Street under the auspices of the Youngstown Area Community Action Agency. It now has 18,000 square feet of clinical space.

That first year, the clinic saw 400 patients. In 2008, it had 68,142 patient visits representing 19,200 users, Dr. Dwinneils said.

The Ohio North East CEO said he is particularly excited about the expansion of the dental clinic from one to five chairs. He said dental care has been identified by the Ohio Department of Health as the top unmet health-care need in the state.

The pharmacy, a new service, represents an opportunity for eligible clients to save significantly on the cost of prescription drugs at all of Ohio North East clinics, Dr. Dwinneils said.

Ohio North East is eligible for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' 340B Drug Pricing Program, which provides access to prescription drugs at prices discounted 40 percent to 50 percent.

A pharmacist and pharmacist's assistant have been hired, and the pharmacy is expected to be open in a couple of months, Dr. Dwinneils said.

He said the health system has received \$377,723 in federal stimulus package funds to enhance operations which will be used to hire an additional dentist and the pharmacist and support staff.

In anticipation of more federal stimulus dollars, Ohio North East is developing plans for more facility and program expansions in Youngstown and Warren and in other areas in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties as well as providing services in partnership with other agencies.

"I'm very interested in putting up another building on the Youngstown site where patients could be seen by specialists. For a variety of reasons, including transportation, it is difficult to get patients to specialists after we do primary care," he said.

There are a number of altruistic physicians in the community who would volunteer their services, and a site here would make that much easier to accomplish, Dr. Dwinneils said.

"I'm excited about the new facilities. The future is very bright for us," he said.

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