

Community-based clinics offer best solution to health care crisis

RECENT HEADLINES in The Milwaukee Journal have focused on the welfare dilemma that local and state elected officials are facing in finding money for the general assistance program. The reality we are facing in the health care industry is that, with or without income, these residents will require health services.

There is a cost-effective solution that provides access to quality health care and saves \$10 million to \$12 million a year in general relief dollars. Basically, it requires a shift in the primary health care provider from the current hospital-based system to community-based clinics.

There are 18,500 individuals in the general relief medical program in Milwaukee County and 41,000 statewide. Milwaukee County's general relief recipients constitute approximately 45% of the statewide general relief population, yet they require 75% of the state's general relief medical budget.

The current method of providing medical care to this population is to offer all of it at Doyne and Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospitals, the total an-



IN MY OPINION

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nual bill for which is approximately \$21 million in state tax dollars and \$16 million in county tax dollars.

One problem is that the population resides primarily in Milwaukee's central city, yet it is forced to travel to Wauwatosa. As a result, these individuals often fail to go for primary and preventive medical care. They wait until a medical situation turns into an emergency, then

use ambulance transport to the emergency room, which provides medical care at a much higher cost than primary providers can.

Community-based clinics like the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center offer quality primary health care in a setting that is more convenient and cost-effective than a hospital. The general relief medical program could be revised by requiring recipients to go to community clinics for their primary care, saving the county and state money. Based on the state's own data, the cost of an average patient visit at Doyne Hospital is \$551. The cost per visit at Sixteenth Street center averages \$60.

Community-based clinics in Milwaukee offer a proven solution that fits into the vision of a new approach to health care. We can reduce the state's and county's commitment of tax dollars to cover the health care costs of general relief residents, while at the same time improving the level of services they are receiving.

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