

Community health clinics grow along with the demand for care

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The number of community-based, freestanding clinics in Milwaukee — now at 15 — has more than doubled in the last four years, and in 1995 alone provided more than 150,000 patient visits and more than \$5.5 million in free medical care.

This is in sharp contrast to 1991, when there were 100,000 patient visits — almost all

provided by just three clinics. Those clinics traditionally served the poorest and most disadvantaged of Milwaukee's citizens and neighborhoods.

But changes in the economy now have produced legions of "working poor" — those with full-time jobs but without health benefits who are depending more and more on such clinics.

Kelly Haines, 25, of West Allis, is one. Haines, who works full time in a day care

center, cannot afford health insurance for herself and her two young children. Formerly on Medicaid, she no longer qualifies because she earns too much.

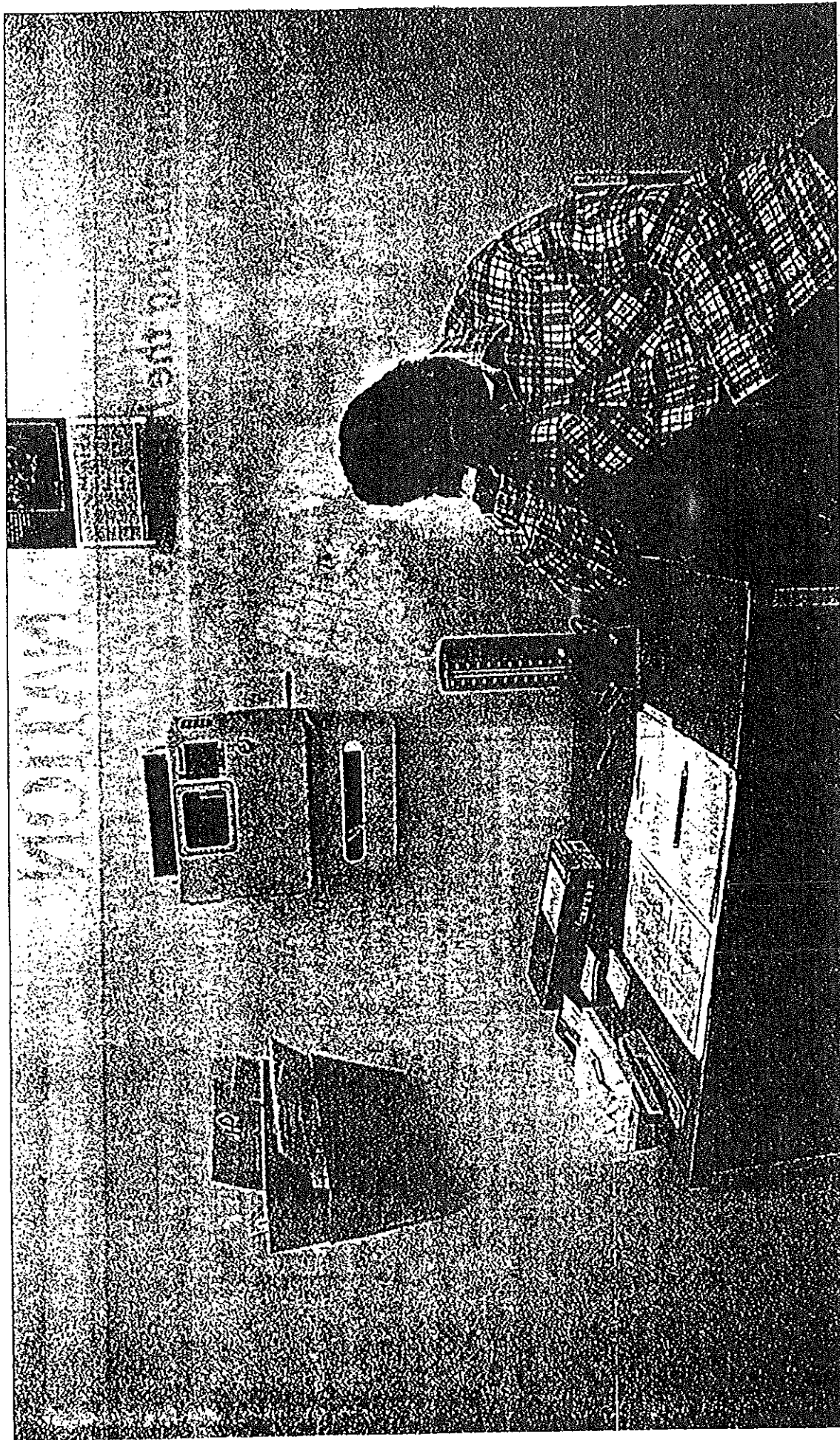
"It's great to know there is someplace I can go to get care," she said of the Greater Milwaukee Free Clinic in West Allis, which opened in December to help the uninsured working poor.

"The intention of the clinic is to help people who can't afford health care. Please see CARE page 4



KAREN SHERLOCK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Curtis Kommer, a doctor at St. Bertha's Clinic, 1027 N. 9th St., examines the ankle of James Holmquist of Milwaukee. Holmquist has a chipped bone. The clinic caters mostly to men ages 21 to 44.



KAREN SHERLOCK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Anthony Troop, of Milwaukee, came to St. Ben's Clinic for a toothache as well as a flu shot and social services. The clinic offers medical care to homeless patients and is among a growing number of clinics that report seeing more poor and uninsured working-class patients over the past few years.

Care/Clinics focus on prevention during patient visits

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is to help people who are working to sincerely help themselves and their families," said Executive Director Kathleen Schneider. "There is a proportion of the population that is falling between the cracks. People are going to find it harder to find medical care. We hope to help them over the hump."

But she also pointed out such assistance is intended to be temporary. And the demand continues to rise.

"Every year we see a significant increase. As the economy changes, with all of the re-engineering and downsizing, as people are laid off and cannot afford continuance of health insurance, we get people who are not insured," said John Bartkowski, chief executive officer at the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center.

Another spike in demand for community health clinics is like-

ly to come in the wake of the recent closing of Doyno Hospital, formerly known as the Milwaukee County Medical Complex, where many uninsured people had sought care, often times inappropriately in the emergency department.

"A lot of us are dreading the moment when Doyno Hospital closes. Where will we get the specialty care we need?" said Allin Walker, director of Health Care for the Homeless, which provided \$1.8 million in free care this year at several area community clinics.

The surge in demand is apparent at St. Luke's Medical Center's Madison Street clinic, 931 W. Madison St., which serves mostly Hispanics and nearby neighbors. That clinic had 2,300 patient visits in 1994. By mid-December this year, the visits had mushroomed 78% to 4,100.

The freestanding clinics are not the only source of care for

the uninsured or underinsured. Many hospital-based clinics such as those that existed at Doyno and Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital give free care to the uninsured and working poor.

And some private, for-profit clinics also give free care. Genesis Health Care Inc., for example, runs three medical centers where 1% to 2% of patients are uninsured and care is provided on a sliding-scale fee based on income.

There also are hybrid and specialty clinics. The New Start Clinic for Women in the Medical College of Wisconsin Clinic at 210 W. Capitol Drive gives away \$62,000 a year in free care — exams, tests, limited medical treatment and some obstetric services to underinsured and uninsured women on Saturday mornings, said medical director Lorena Chicoye.

But for growing numbers of needy people, the community-based, free-standing clinic with its large component of volunteer medical care is the primary medical caregiver.

Free care by no means translates into inferior care.

In fact, clinics provide some of the savviest preventive medical care at any price — care such as immunizations for children when parents bring them because of a fever and sore throat.

Most clinics use every patient visit as an opportunity to test for a variety of health conditions and problems.

"Somebody will come in with a cut finger and find out they have a sexually transmitted disease. Or a cold and find out they're pregnant," said Steve Ohly, the nurse practitioner who runs the Madison Street Clinic.

Clinic workers and medical personnel also see visits as a chance to work on related social and health problems, said Joan Lawrence, director of development and community health services for Rainbow Community Health, which operates three clinics including one primarily for American Indians.

Her clinics all have allied health services — drug and alcohol counseling, social work-

ers, mental health services, HIV case management and anonymous AIDS testing.

"If they're alcoholics and you're treating them for high blood pressure, you'd better treat them for alcoholism, too," or it won't do any good, Lawrence said.

Workers from the Madison Street Clinic picked up a 24-year-old homeless man at a soup kitchen and diagnosed pneumonia.

"We see him, treat him, do follow-up and get him a respite bed at the Salvation Army shelter," said Steve Ohly, the nurse practitioner who runs the clinic.

St. Luke's, which funds the clinic, estimated the cost of the man's care would have been \$1,228 if he'd been treated in the hospital emergency room. At the clinic, it cost about \$55, Ohly said. The patient paid nothing.

Another example: Two families with no insurance living in one small house brought seven children in to the clinic. Six had ear infections. All were treated and clinic staff used the opportunity to get the kids properly

immunized as well.

If seen at the family practice hospital outpatient center, the cost would have been around \$530. At the clinic, it cost \$65. Patients paid nothing.

"And they can stay further out of debt and don't become homeless," Ohly said.

Patient education is a strong point of many clinics.

"The one thing all our patients have in common is poverty" and not having a lot of experience with going to doctors or getting preventive medical care, Lawrence said.

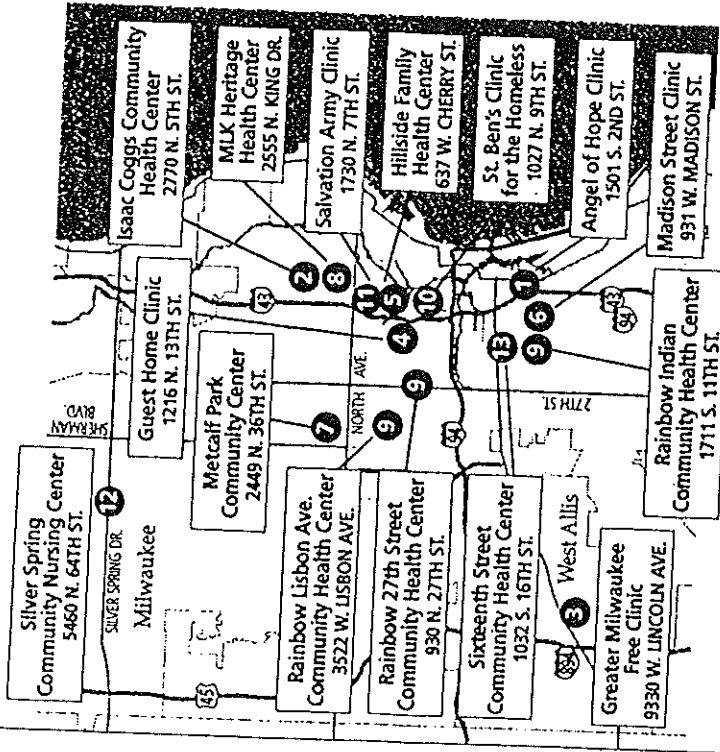
"Some people do basic things they've never seen or learned sometimes."

Nurse-midwife services, rather than care provided only by doctors, have also expanded at clinics. The main Rainbow clinic on N. 27th St. hired its first nurse-midwife two years ago, unsure of the need. It soon hired a second "and now we're about to hire a third," Lawrence said.

The clinic has 16 examining rooms "and we probably could use 20," she said.

Community-based medical clinics grow to meet rising demand

Once used mainly for the poor, the clinics are now being used by working-class people who can't afford insurance. In 1995, the clinics had more than 150,000 patient visits, valued at \$5 million in free medical care.



OPENERY PHONE	TYPE OF CARE	PATIENTS	HOURS	PATIENT VISITS	VALUE OF FREE CARE
1 June 1995 645-2122	Primary care Emergency care Obstetrics Gynecology	Homeless 70% uninsured	3 to 9 p.m. Mon.-Tues. 1 to 4 p.m. Wed. 1 to 9 p.m. Thur. 1 to 3 p.m. Fri.	200 adults 75 children so far	\$75,000 so far
2 1979 285-8882	Primary care Dental care	Medicare patients	8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays 8 a.m. to noon Saturday	14,000 in 1991 17,700 in 1992 23,600 in 1993 27,200 in 1994	\$1.8 million
3 Dec. 1995 546-3733	General care	Working poor, those without health insurance	5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Tues and Thur. Intake/screening Exams till 9 p.m.	About 20 a night	Not available
4 June 1985 345-3250	Primary care Psychiatric care adults only	Mostly homeless people	6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Mondays 9 a.m. to noon Thursday	2,130 in 1981 2,036 in 1992 2,215 in 1993 2,384 in 1994	About \$60,000 a year
5 April 1995 272-0198	General care for Hillside housing project only	60% uninsured	9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays	200	About \$15,000 so far
6 Jan. 1994 384-1400	Urgent and primary care	Adults and children	2 to 5 p.m. Mon. 3 to 7 p.m. Tue. 1 to 5 p.m. Wed./Thur.	2,300 in 1994 4,100 in 1995	\$1.1 million in 1994 More than \$2 million in 1995
7 1991 449-8384	Medical and Pediatrics Obstetrics	Anyone 60% uninsured	8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays	1,000 in 1992 1,375 in 1993 1,625 in 1994 2,375 in 1995	\$135,000 a year
8 May 1995 372-8080	Medical care Pediatrics Obstetrics Gynecology Dental care	More than 40% uninsured	8 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays	9,000 so far	\$900,000 so far
9 27th St. 777 931-8111	Medical care Dental care Pediatrics	Anyone	8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturdays	ALL THREE CLINICS 27,080 in 1991 27,312 in 1992 30,740 in 1993 31,770 in 1994 Close to 40,000 in 1995	In 1994 \$300,000 in free medical care \$140,000 in free dental
10 11th St. 92 383-9526	Medical care Dental care Pediatrics	Primarily for American Indians	8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays for medical, dental hours vary		
11 Lisbon Ave. Oct. 1994 937-6600	Medical care Pediatrics care	Anyone	8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mon./Fri.		
12 1980 765-0606	General care	Mostly homeless	1 to 6 p.m. Mon., Wed., Thur. other times by appointment	2,856 in 1991 3,120 in 1992 3,540 in 1993 3,924 in 1994	\$100,000 a year
13 1991 265-6360	Medical care Some obstetrics Some pediatrics	Open to all but mostly homeless 90% uninsured	8 a.m. to noon Mon., Tue., Fri. 2 to 9 p.m. Wed.	325 in 1991 325 in 1992 1,800 in 1993 1,800 in 1994	\$50,000 a year
14 1986 463-7950	Limited medical exams and lab services	Immediate neighborhood and Westlawn housing project	Three mornings and one afternoon each week	6,011 in 1991 6,240 in 1992 5,220 in 1993 5,311 in 1994	\$200,000 a year
15 1969 672-1353	Medical care Obstetrics Pediatrics Dental care	Large number of Hispanic 24% uninsured	8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, until 7 p.m. Mon. and Wed. 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturdays	49,080 in 1991 56,413 in 1992 57,403 in 1993 59,903 in 1994	\$1.7 million a year

Source: Individual clinics