

## Health centers becoming medical homes for many

**Making health care affordable hopefully will relieve drain on emergency rooms.**

By Joanne Huist Smith, Staff Writer

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DAYTON — A \$7,000 hospital bill for diagnosis and treatment of a panic attack stifled Robert Geer's desire to visit an emergency room, no matter how ill he became.

He said the decision to seek medical care since losing his job and health insurance in 2006 has had more to do with cost, than need.

He wasn't worried, though, about the expense of an appointment with his new family doctor on Thursday, July 28, at the East Dayton Health Center, a member of the Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton. The cost of the office visit: \$15, the minimum fee.

"At least now I have a place I can go when I'm sick," Geer said. "They have a sliding fee scale here. It works for me."

Three medical offices — clinics once owned and operated by local hospitals — now form the network of community health centers serving about 7,000 patients a year.

"What separates us from a typical clinic is that we see patients regardless of their ability to pay," said Gregory Hopkins, executive director of Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton.

The goal, alleviate the drain on hospital emergency rooms for treatment of non-emergencies like cold or the flu and provide access to preventative health care. Just 8 percent of patients treated by the Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton in 2009 had insurance, compared to 29 percent who were uninsured. Making the financial difference is a federal qualified health center designation obtained in March 2009 that increased reimbursements for Medicaid and Medicare patient services.

Former Medicaid reimbursements of \$25 to \$65 are now guaranteed at \$122 each. Typical reimbursements for Medicare have gone from \$20 to \$65 to \$96

each.

The network would like to absorb as many health centers as are willing. Discussions are under way with Cassano Family Clinic, 1655 Edwin C. Moses Blvd., Hopkins said.

"Other health centers that don't get that (enhanced) reimbursement are bleeding and their wounds are getting bigger and bigger," said Jim McGuire, a board member of the Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton and also a patient. "The future of some of these programs are diminishing. Because of our status, we can pick them up."

The nonprofit's total budget for 2010 is \$3.8 million. About \$650,000, will come from federal grants. The Montgomery County Human Services Levy committed an additional \$655,000 and a one-time, \$101,000 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant was awarded this year.

The remainder of the budget, about \$2.3 million, will come from Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements, or from patients.

"Because we're able to take money out of the equation for patients and provide quality care, hopefully, they won't be waiting until they have an urgent medical need. They'll come to us for preventative care," Hopkins said.

And, being affordable, doesn't mean diminished quality of care, he said.

"People assume they'll have to wait two or three hours to see a doctor and that they won't see the same physician twice," Hopkins said. "We're just the opposite. We'll be your medical home. We'll get you in and out. You can go on our website and read about all of our doctors and pick your physician."

Setting policy for the health centers is a 17-member board including volunteer chairman Montgomery County Health Commissioner Jim Gross and treasurer, Montgomery County Administrator Deborah Feldman, but a majority of board members are patients.

"There is no distinction between us when we sit at the table," McGuire said.

McGuire had been earning a living as a freelance nature/travel writer, when his 92-year-old mother fell down basement steps breaking a hip and shoulder. McGuire dropped his assignments to care for her. He expected to live off savings for a year, but it took longer for his mother to recover. McGuire got the flu and a cough that lingered. His blood pressure got dangerously high and he developed congestive heart failure. What he didn't have was health insurance.

"If it hadn't been for going to a health center, I wouldn't be here," McGuire said. "I'm back working with no further health problems."

McGuire has health insurance now, but continues to be a patient of the

Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton.

McGuire knew nothing about the "politics or regulations" of running a health center when he joined the board.

"One thing I've learned as an insider is the dedication of the people involved. Nobody comes here for a get rich quick career. The doctors are here to serve."

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## **Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton**

### **Charles Drew Health Center**

1323 W. Third Street, Dayton

Telephone: 461-4336

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.;  
Wednesday & Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.;  
open on Saturday a month 8 a.m. - 1 p.m.

### **Corwin Nixon Health Center**

2351 Stanley Avenue, Dayton

Telephone: 228-6090

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.;  
Wednesday noon - 8 p.m.

### **East Dayton Health Center**

2132 E. Third Street, Dayton

Telephone: 528-6850

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.;  
Thursday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.;  
open on Saturday a month 8 a.m. - noon