

Chippewa Valley Free Clinic Update

by Maribeth Woodford, Executive Director
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Until we have the perfect health care system, every community has a need for a free clinic, this according to **Maribeth Woodford**, Executive Director of the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic. The quality of care that our health care system provides is outstanding, arguably the best in the world, but access to the system leaves a lot to be desired, which means that a lot of our citizens fall through the health care cracks. Fortunately, Eau Claire is a community that wants to take care of all citizens, and thus supports the mission of the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic.

The clinic is located at 421 Graham Avenue in downtown Eau Claire. It is open on Tuesdays starting at 3:00 to see acute care patients, on the first and third Thursdays for diabetes patients, and the second and fourth Thursdays for follow-up appointments. If you drive or walk by the clinic on Tuesdays after noon, you will likely see people starting to line up, and they will often end up waiting several hours to receive care. On a typical Tuesday, the Free Clinic is able to see about 40 patients.

There is no such thing as a typical patient, but many patients do have some things in common. Most are working adults, but do not have adequate resources to afford health care, do not have insurance and do not qualify for other government benefits. In many cases, the Free Clinic is their last hope for receiving basic health care services. And if the Free Clinic didn't exist, these patients would end up going to a hospital emergency room.

The Free Clinic does have six employees (three full time equivalents), however, the clinic is able to operate because of the over 200 volunteers, including the doctors, nurses, lab technicians, social workers, and clerical staff. There is a great deal of collaboration with Mayo, Sacred Heart and Marshfield health care systems. In addition, the Free Clinic does have a dispensary for drugs and is able to purchase drugs at a substantial discount... 10 cents on the dollar.

The challenges that the Free Clinic faces are many. There continue to be more uninsured or underinsured workers, which means more patients want to visit the clinic. At the present time, some are being turned away. In addition, those that may have lost a job or their insurance tend to wait longer before seeking care... thus, tend to be sicker. The Free Clinic is hoping to add another afternoon/evening to see patients, but this will require a significant increase in volunteer hours.

The Chippewa Valley Free Clinic is always looking for additional community support. One of the most obvious ways is private donations. The Free Clinic does accept United Way support, however, they do not accept any Federal or state grants... there is just too much red tape and too many conditions attached to such grants. Another way to help is to volunteer time. The needs are many and range from professional medical care down to clerical help, so anyone's skills can be utilized.

In conclusion, Woodford thanked our Club for the opportunity to share the Free Clinic's story, thanked the community for supporting the Clinic, and then answered our questions.

For more information, go to www.cvfreeclinic.org.



Maribeth Woodford,
Executive Director of the
Chippewa Valley Free Clinic