

Commentary: Naples clinic evolves to meet changing need

Nancy Lascheid, Naples, Neighborhood Health Clinic 5:38 p.m. ET Jan. 11, 2017



Nancy Lascheid Naples Neighborhood Health Clinic(Photo: Provided)

As we enter the new year, I am reminded of the Neighborhood Health Clinic's humble beginnings and how much has changed since opening our doors nearly 18 years ago.

My husband, Bill, and I decided to launch a nonprofit medical clinic for the area's working poor in 1998, after retiring from our dermatology practice. The core of the mission was simple: quality medical and dental service provided by volunteer medical and dental professionals and funded completely by private philanthropy.

In April 1999, the Neighborhood Health Clinic opened in space donated by NCH Healthcare System on Goodlette-Frank Road with one doctor, one nurse and one volunteer. We saw eight patients.

During the early years, we offered acute and episodic care to men and women in need on Mondays and Thursdays, from 3 to 7 p.m., and every other Saturday.

As the area grew, the community's needs evolved and so did the clinic. In 2003, we moved into a state-of-the-art facility at 121 Goodlette-Frank Road North and began to flourish.

Today, we continue to serve uninsured, 19- to 64-year-olds who live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (\$23,760) and who are without access to other forms of health benefits, such as Medicaid and Medicare. Patients must also reside in Collier County and work a minimum of 80 hours a month.

In 1999, our typical patient was a 20- to 30-year-old male. Now, our typical patient is in her mid- to late-40s with children.

As the number of working poor continues to grow locally, patients seek us out. We care for more than 200 patients a week, providing more than 9,300 visits annually.

Tragically, by the time most of our patients access clinic care, their health issues have compounded due to their lack of access to medical care and lack of resources. They are now dealing with chronic, even life-threatening, conditions.

As a result, the clinic has moved to a comprehensive care approach, including the treatment of chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

Dental and specialty care, including cardiology, dermatology, endocrinology, otolaryngology, gynecology, hepatitis C, hepatology, lipids, neurology, rheumatology and urology, are now offered in-house.

Patient education and research in diabetes self-management, healthy lifestyles, breast health awareness, smoking cessation, pain management, hepatitis C treatment and support, colon cancer screenings and social services empower patients to actively engage in self-care and prevention.

We also partner with local health care providers to bridge the gap between clinic services and the unmet needs of patients.

Patients leave visits with their (non-narcotic) medications in hand, which increases adherence and improves health outcomes. Medications are sourced through samples from doctors' offices, pharmaceutical companies' patient assistance programs (PAP) and purchased at a discount bulk rate.

Basic laboratory services are provided on-site while outside laboratories provide complex testing at no cost to patients or our facility.

Patients donate to the clinic's operating costs, typically \$5 to \$30. They are never billed or charged a fee.

Growing needs and enhanced services mean expanded hours. The clinic is now open every day except Sunday and alternating Saturdays.

Yes, a lot has changed since the Neighborhood Health Clinic opened its doors in 1999. My husband passed away, our daughter Leslie Lascheid was named as chief executive officer by the board of directors in 2012, the community – and need for the clinic – has grown dramatically and we've worked diligently with donors, volunteers and local businesses to meet that need.

But one thing remains constant: our dedication to providing hope and healing for those in need.

To learn more about the Neighborhood Health Clinic, including programs, services, sponsorship and volunteer opportunities, please call 239-261-6600, or visit www.NeighborhoodHealthClinic.org.

Lascheid, R.N., is co-founder and chair of governance of the Neighborhood Health Clinic.

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