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# Mercy 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

# MercyHealthClinic

Quality Health Care from the Heart for Those in Need

# Mercy MATTERS

Fall 2010

The Mercy Health Clinic is a free, not-for-profit, non-sectarian, community based primary health care provider serving uninsured, low-income adult residents of Montgomery County, Maryland. The Clinic, with more than 150 dedicated volunteers, is committed to continually seeking ways to improve and expand the quality of primary medical care, educational support and pharmaceuticals it provides free of charge to eligible patients.

Mercy Health Clinic relies on support from individuals, estates, corporations, foundations, community service organizations and religious groups who generously donate their time, talent and resources to the Clinic and the patients it serves.

## Clinic Expands Functions to New Space

On November 6 the Clinic moved two patient functions and four staff offices into new space adjoining the current facility completing a year and a half effort by the board and staff. The 1,800 square foot addition provides more functional space for eligibility screening of patients for admission, a larger room for the Lifestyle Education and Diabetes program and four offices for Clinic staff.

Eligibility screening of patients involves discussing confidential patient income, health and family information. Formerly screenings were done in such cramped space that patient privacy was non-existent. Now patients will have the privacy they need. The Life Style Education program was holding its 8-week evening classes in the small waiting room. As the clinic sees patients two evenings, the waiting room is available only one night a week. Now the program not only has a large classroom available every evening, but daytime as well and state of the art IT equipment including an interactive white board, a built in projector and audio-visual capabilities.

The four staff offices will free offices formerly occupied in the current facility for much needed work stations for several nurses, the patient navigator and three Life Style educators. This second phase of the project currently underway will also enlarge the Physician's Study and the clinic kitchen which were so cramped that volunteers and staff couldn't always access these rooms.

The \$153,000 expansion was funded by grants from the Cafritz Foundation, Kaiser Permanent Health, Montgomery County Council, Saint Mark Presbyterian Church and Standard Properties (landlord). Pro-bono donations of services from First Potomac Management (construction management) and Health Design Group (design and building drawings) and Armstrong, Donohoe, Ceppos, Vaughn & Rhoades, (legal) reduced the costs of the project. The General Contractor CCS, Inc., bid the project at \$63 per sf, further reducing costs. Montgomery County Department of Health & Human Services and Real Estate were instrumental in obtaining



County Councilmember George Leventhal, (2nd from left) Saint Mark Presbyterian Church Pastor Roy Howard and member Barbara Welsh discuss construction progress with Dick Pavlin, Executive Director.

County approvals and negotiating the terms of the lease with the landlord.

A dedication of the new space has been tentatively scheduled for the second week in January to celebrate the completion of the project.

## Golf Classic

Golfers had an unseasonably warm but enjoyable day September 24 at PB Dye Golf Club playing in the Clinics 7th Annual tourney. Led by Chair Tap Taplin, the seasoned Golf Committee once again produced a well run event raising \$90,000 for the Clinic.

The silent auction included two grounds tickets to the US Open next June at Congressional Country Club obtained by Carole Bittman. Chairman Taplin won the bidding for the tickets, a fitting reward for his efforts in leading the Golf Committee.

A moment of silence was taken after dinner for Dr. Thai McGreivy, one of the founding physicians of Medical Emergency Physicians who died in June of a heart attack. Dr. McGreivy volunteered his services at Mercy and was a regular player in the annual tourney. He is missed by all who knew him.

Committee members who contributed their time and talent to staging the tourney included Carole Bittman, Susan Brewer, Barry Covington, Ben Daughtry, Phil Dolan, Patrick Duke, Megan Fisher, Joe Giere, Dan Jay, Alvina Long, Wayne Marsden, Mary O'Connor, Dick Pavlin, Chris Perez, Tom Tamm and Ed Treacy.



For the year ending December 31, 2009, the clinic served 2,230 patients with 10,440 patient visits. Fifty-five volunteer physicians and 140 other volunteers provided \$1.8 million in donated services. Shady Grove Adventist Hospital donated all lab work, Community Radiology, Shady Grove Radiological, PNI Open MRI, and Washington Radiology donated all radiology. Watkins, Meegan & Drury donated auditing services and Armstrong, Donohue, Ceppos & Vaughan donated all legal services.

## New Medical Director Continues Tradition of Volunteerism

Dr. Nancy Ripp Clark succeeds Dr. Jim Ronan who stepped down in September after 10 years of extraordinary volunteer service. Dr. Ripp continues the tradition of volunteer service, having begun as a volunteer physician at the clinic in 2001. A graduate of Georgetown School of Medicine, she did her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Washington Hospital Center and joined Women Physicians, P.C. in 1985, retiring in 1997. She is a Fellow of the American College of Obstetrics & Gynecology.

A proud mother of five children, she is an active member of Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church where she was Chair of the Parish Council in 2009-2010. An avid tennis player, she is Chair of the Women's Tennis Association at Congressional Country Club.

Dr. Ripp Clark said "I am honored to have been asked to follow in Jim Ronan's footsteps as Medical Director. Jim has been an inspirational role model and mentor to me over many years working at the clinic. I hope to be able to continue to uphold the high standards that he has set."

## Message from the Executive Director



The looming County government budget deficit for FY 2012 threatens to impact patients at Mercy and ten other Montgomery Cares Clinics. Already this year the County placed a ceiling on the number of patient encounters for which they will reimburse each clinic. The ceiling is (15,037) encounters less than the 85,037 patient encounters the clinics projected for FY 11 - an 17.7 % decrease. This translates into an estimated 5,000 patients who may not be able to receive care at Mercy and the other clinics once the ceiling on patient encounters is reached.

What may happen when Mercy and the other clinics reach the ceiling and must tell approx. 5,000 already enrolled patients – many of whom are chronically ill - they can no longer receive care? Chronically ill patients with such conditions as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease are put at further risk for life threatening illnesses. They will likely turn to the already over loaded hospital emergency rooms - a more costly setting to obtain health care.

At most clinics, patients may be asked to pay on a sliding fee scale adjusted to their income. But because Mercy is a free clinic, we can't look to patients to offset the County cut in reimbursement. Likewise, contributions from the private sector can't be expected to make up the difference as foundations, businesses and individual donors face the same economic difficulties that produced the County deficit. Further reductions in either the reimbursement rate or patient encounters in FY 2012 could threaten the health care status of patients while also jeopardizing the financial stability of the clinics. The clinics operate on the margins of sustainability, constantly balancing the level of services they can provide with realized income. Likewise patients at the clinics usually live on the margins of good health.

That's why we urge you to contact your County Council member now and ask them not to make further cuts in the Montgomery Cares program in FY 2012. In doing so, you may save a life!

Councilmember.Leventhal@montgomerycountymd.gov

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## Board Adopts Good Governance Practices

At its October meeting, the Board unanimously approved a package of good governance practices, following a six month long study by the Board Governance Task Force. The Task Force, led by Chair Hal Shelton and guided by consultant Brigette Rouson, presented a 35 page report to the board including recommendations, proposed Bylaws amendments and research findings. The comprehensive report outlined 5 areas where governance best practices were recommended, including the role and responsibilities of the Board, number, term and composition of the Board, committee structure, Board self assessment and performance review of the Executive and Medical Directors.

The Governance Task Force was an outgrowth of the Strategic Planning process begun in 2009, culminating in a Board planning retreat in March of 2010 facilitated by Brigette Rouson. Funding from the Nonprofit Advancement Fund for Montgomery County Fund, a part of the Community Foundation of the National Capital Region, enabled the Clinic to hire Rouson to lead the two year process beginning with strategic planning followed by good governance practice.

Board members on the Task Force in addition to Chair Hal Shelton included Sharon Covington, Wayne Marsden, Frank Molony, and Bill Rooker. Executive Director Dick Pavlin and consultant Brigette Rouson staffed the Task Force.

## Meet the Patient

A 45 year old father of three with diabetes, Fred began feeling pain in his right leg and sought care at the Clinic where he was a patient. The examining physician found inflammation and swelling in Fred's leg. Because Fred's diabetes was already causing neuropathy – a loss of sensation in fingers and toes – an MRI Doppler was ordered. But the results were inconclusive and the Clinic physicians referred him to several other specialists, including a podiatrist.

The podiatrist found that Fred had a small fracture in his foot which due to his neuropathy, caused by his diabetes, he couldn't feel. A diagnosis of Charcot Foot led to Fred being treated by the Clinic's orthopedist, who through intensive treatment and follow-up X-rays stabilized the fracture, allowing the foot bone to heal. Through Mercy's network of partners, Fred was able to be seen at Holy Cross Hospitals lymphoedema clinic where a physical therapist worked with him to regain the use of his leg and foot.

During the 6 month course of treatment, Fred was unable to work since he couldn't walk because the swelling was slow to subside. But Today, Fred's foot and leg have returned to normal and he is able to wear his regular shoe and walk . He is now back to work and able to support his family.

## New Staff Join Clinic

Three new staff recently joined the clinic and have already begun making contributions to clinic services. Shawna Green started in August as the new Clinic Administrator. Wendell Pierre came at the beginning of October as our Senior Accountant. And Lizbeth Rodriguez also started in October as our Patient Navigator.

We welcome these new colleagues and look forward to the improvements they will bring to our services.