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# The Times-Picayune

## Health clinic brings care closer Mobile unit parks in neighborhood

Thursday, April 03, 2008

By Valerie Faciane  
Staff writer

Home remodeling worker Johnny Traylor was visiting the Just the Right Attitude food bank in eastern New Orleans recently when he noticed a large mobile medical unit parked just a few steps away.

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The facility offers blood pressure and blood sugar screenings, a visit with a physician and much more -- all for a fraction of what he'd pay for a regular doctor's visit.

"It's a good setup," said Traylor, 54, a New Orleans resident who received treatment at the clinic for his diabetes. "The people here are concerned about your health."

The mobile unit serves as a patient's point of entry into the health care system, making referrals to a network of clinics and health care partnerships in the greater New Orleans area.

An average of at least 15 people -- some of whom have not seen a doctor since Hurricane Katrina -- visit the mobile clinic each week to be treated for a wide range of ailments, including high blood pressure, diabetes, flu, kidney infections, asthma and pneumonia.

There's normally no waiting and appointments are not required to visit the clinic, which is staffed by Dr. Manuel Imseis and a team of nurses and medical assistants.

The medical unit is part of the EXCELth Inc. Primary Care Network, a federally funded nonprofit health care organization that has been serving patients in New Orleans since 1991.

EXCELth entered into a partnership with Just the Right Attitude in the fall of 2006 at the behest of food bank founder Debra Jones, who was concerned about the health care needs of her clients and others in the community.

She'd heard complaints from some about having to stand in line for hours to see the doctors at Operation Blessing, a free clinic that operated in eastern New Orleans from April 2006 until it closed in December.

"They would start lining up at 4 in the morning," Jones said.

Jones contacted EXCELth, which at the time was treating storm evacuees at its mobile medical unit and a fixed site in Baton Rouge and was preparing to offer mobile medical services in New Orleans. She asked EXCELth to consider sending its unit to the parking lot of Faith Church in eastern New Orleans, where she operated her food bank.

EXCELth agreed, and when Jones moved the food bank to its current location at 6836 Bundy Road in February 2007, the mobile unit followed. The food bank and mobile health unit soon will move again -- this time to a vacant automobile dealership at 13150 Interstate 10 Service Road. The start date for the new location is April 14.

The unit operates Mondays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Fees are a minimum of \$20, depending on a person's income and family size. Patients receive a wide array of health care services, including a visit with a doctor, case management, HIV counseling and testing, blood pressure and blood glucose screening, prescription medication assistance and health education.

Patients are asked to bring proof of identification, such as a driver's license or state identification card, and proof of monthly or annual income or a health insurance card.

Services are available to anyone regardless of their ability to pay, said mobile medical unit coordinator Aurelia Celestine.

During Traylor's visit, he got some advice from Deborah Davenport, a licensed practical nurse, on the importance of following through on his medical referral.

"Diabetes is a disease and high blood pressure is a disease that affect all the organs in the body," she explained. "Stop smoking and eating salt and take your medicine."

Fannie Beamer, a hotel housekeeper who has thyroid problems and does not have health insurance, said she was pleased with her recent visit to EXCELth.

"Other doctors charge a whole lot," said Beamer, an eastern New Orleans resident who also sometimes visits the food bank. "I'm more comfortable here because of my budget."

For information on EXCELth and its services, call (504) 444-7071.

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