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Free local medical clinic will serve the uninsured

DALLAS -- A free medical clinic to treat uninsured residents of Polk County and other areas will open in Dallas sometime this year.



Barbara McGuffey

Craig Coleman

DALLAS -- A free medical clinic to treat uninsured residents of Polk County and other areas will open in Dallas sometime this year.

The Polk Community Free Clinic Coalition recently announced that it will operate a satellite location of Salem Free Medical Clinic at Trinity Lutheran Church on Washington Street.

Applications are being sought for volunteer physicians, nurses, support staff and other personnel to treat and process patients.

"I think it's incredibly important for the area," said Todd Gould, executive director of SFMC. Gould said his and the Polk organization finalized an agreement last week after six months of discussion.

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"The uninsured rate in Polk County has increased dramatically in the last 10 years," he said, "especially with corporations that have closed, like Tyco and the lumber mills."

The Polk Community Free Clinic will offer primary care services and treatment, prescription assistance, and management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and depression anxiety disorders, said Barbara McGuffey, Trinity Lutheran's parish nurse and a project coordinator.

"This won't be an emergency clinic," McGuffey said.

The program will be modeled after SFMC's South Salem satellite site, with about 25 volunteers running one clinic a month.

"They're averaging 25 to 30 clients," Gould said, noting clinic days could increase depending on volunteer availability.

Patients can live anywhere in Polk County -- or beyond. Being uninsured is the only criteria for treatment.

The Polk coalition, which has members from county departments, school districts and Western Oregon University, have researched a local free clinic for years and performed local surveys and a needs assessment in 2010.

That analysis cited figures from the federal Small Area Health Insurance Estimates Program, showing between 31.5 percent and 38.9 percent of Polk County residents were uninsured.

Salem's average is 25 percent and the national average is 18 percent, Gould said.

"One reason we're aware of the need in Polk County is because 10 percent of the people we serve at our main Broadway location are from Dallas," Gould said.

The Trikerion Foundation, a Trinity Lutheran-related foundation, will allow clinic space in the church for free, McGuffey said. The church, meanwhile, will relocate to a new building on Fir Villa Road in April.

McGuffey said that the clinic will have to be financially self-sustaining, though funds shouldn't be a problem to start.

The coalition has just received a \$40,000 grant from Wheat Ridge Industries. Contributions are expected from Salem Health, while WOU health and education are coordinating a fundraiser.

Gould said he hoped the clinic could open by mid- to late-summer, though that hinges on available volunteers and training them.

"Money isn't a limiting factor right now," McGuffey said. "It's people."

Get Involved

* Medical and support volunteers are being sought for the Polk Community Free Clinic. Applications for needed positions are available at www.salemfreemedclinic.org. Processing takes six to eight weeks.

Applications are also available at Trinity Lutheran Church, 450 SE Washington St., Dallas, and Evangelical Bible Church, 1175 Howe St., Dallas.

Potential volunteers who want to learn more about the free clinic can attend a special "volunteer night" meeting at Trinity Lutheran on Wednesday, March 30, at 7 p.m.

For more information: Barbara McGuffey, 503-623-2233.