

Taking Care of Folks at Every Stage of Life

A public health story from...

St. Louis County Public Health Department



lderly Mr. Smith has heart disease and high blood pressure. His neighbor, Mrs. Jones, has a bad toothache. And Mrs. Jones' daughter is pregnant, but experiencing unusual dizziness. None has health insurance. These three are a

composite of the 8,400 people who walk into St. Louis County's three public health clinics each month. They come for a variety of medical reasons, ranging from prenatal and dental care to combating sexually transmitted and chronic diseases. Each is confident about one thing: care is provided even if one cannot pay, even if one does not have insurance.

"We provide comprehensive medical services to the uninsured and underinsured residents of St. Louis County," says Al Swanegan, the clinics' administrator. "Without us, I'm sure area emergency rooms would have to handle many more patients."

What's more, the quality of care a person receives at the clinics is first-rate and individualized, similar to that found in a private family doctor's office, says Swanegan. Why? Each of the clinics has two family practice physicians, a pediatrician, and women's health specialists on staff, while most of Missouri's local public health agencies--114 in all--have no such doctors on staff. "This means we can provide services for people of all ages," Swanegan adds. "We can provide the comprehensive care they need right here, and when we cannot, our collaborations with other local health entities allow us to refer them to providers who can."

The clinics have also carved out a funding collaboration with St. Louis and Washington Universities, and Barnes-Jewish Hospital, consistently ranked among the top ten in the nation's hospitals. "Our various collaborations allow us to provide the comprehensive healthcare that families require," says Swanegan. "We also combat the problem of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) head-on with confidential testing and counseling services. Our health centers are a dynamic and important element of the healthcare infrastructure in the St. Louis area. Our goal is always a healthy community of healthy individuals at every stage of life."

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