

# Eaton County dental clinic opens its doors



Written by

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EATON CO. - Children on Medicaid and other low-income people in Eaton County have something to smile about.

Eaton County government and a northern Michigan non-profit have teamed up to use business principles to bring quality dental services to low income Eaton County residents. And they expect to make money doing it, without taxpayers being on the hook for the program's cost.

Last month Eaton County's new dental clinic, located at 623 Courthouse Drive in Charlotte, threw open its doors to the public to meet the staff and walk through the new facility.

The clinic, built by the county but operated by Michigan Community Dental Clinics (MCDC), whose rent payments to the county are expected to cover the bond payments which paid for construction, serves children on Medicaid (including Healthy Kids Dental and MICHild) at no charge, adults on Medicaid with a \$3 co-pay and low income

uninsured individuals at reduced fees.

The Eaton County facility is MCDC's 18th clinic, with two more scheduled to open later this year, said Dr. Thomas Veryser, MCDC's Chief Executive Officer.

Veryser said MCDC's business model allows it to operate with no government subsidy and pay competitive salaries by standardization and efficiencies through electronic record keeping.

"If you look at 10 of these clinics, they all look about the same," he said. "That is savings, plus we can get a handle on quality."

The clinic expects no shortage of patients.

"Many, many, many people in our community cannot afford to see a private dentist," said Colette Scrimger, Deputy Health Officer for the Barry-Eaton District Health Department, which contracts with MCDC to operate the clinic.

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Dr. Julie Monroy, director of the Eaton County clinic, said the clinic is operating at full capacity, with appointments currently being made through April

Monroy, who graduated from the University of Detroit Dental School in 2007, said she left another job to come to this position because: "I believe in this program."

Anyone wishing to obtain dental services should call MCDC toll-free at (877) 733-6232 to register.

For low-income uninsured patients, a one-time \$50 charge is assessed, which covers plan membership, one oral exam with x-rays, a treatment plan and discounted prices, up to 40 percent, on services.

Services offered at the clinic include oral exams, cleaning, fillings, tooth removal, teeth replacement, emergency treatment and fluoride treatments.

MCDC operates on a "social entrepreneur model," which uses business principles to solve social problems.

"As far as I know it's unique," said Veryser.

"We created a model that allows for a public private partnership that allows a private organization to provide services on behalf of a government agency, and so we are operating dental clinics on behalf of public health departments."

Veryser said MCDC is able to cover its expenses by using a highly efficient

business model which relies on technology.

"We operate the system efficiently with a central administration (in Charlevoix) to do all the billing and all the hiring and administer all those functions, and if you do that well you get some economies of scale," he said.

Also, the MCDC relies entirely on electronic records.

"It makes for records that you can press a button and they are available," said Veryser.

"You get a tremendous savings in time spent in accumulating records. There is probably a 20 percent efficiency gained in that," he said.

"Without modern technology, we wouldn't be having this conversation. We couldn't operate."

Their business model does not rely on volunteers or participants expected to

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make financial sacrifices.

Professional reimbursement is based on rates paid by major insurers, and a newly minted DDS can earn in excess of \$100,000, according to a presentation given to the county Ways and Means Committee by Veryser.

After practicing dentistry in Michigan's thumb area for more than 20 years, Veryser taught dentistry at the University of Michigan Dental School and served as Assistant Dean.

In 2004, he joined Dental Clinics North, a division of the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, serving as Dental Director.

In 2007, the dental operation separated from the health department and reorganized as a non-profit.

"We had 10 dental clinics, and wanted to spin it off, because the dental project was getting bigger than the health department," Veryser said.

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