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Rural health clinic set to open

November 11, 2011

By KURT HAUGLIE - DMG writer (khauglie@mininggazette.com) , The Daily Mining Gazette

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FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP - Despite a series of delays since it was announced in January 2010, the operators of a proposed health clinic said it will be open completely in 2012.

Donna Jaksic, executive director of Upper Peninsula Association of Rural Health Services Inc. in Marquette, said Tuesday efforts are continuing to open the Quincy Hill Community Health Center, which will be located on U.S. 41 north of Hancock in Franklin Township.

"We're working slowly in the background," she said.

Jaksic said in 2009, a study was done of the feasibility of setting up in the Copper Country a clinic, which would provide low-cost medical and dental care for local residents. In January 2010, it was announced during a press conference in the former SK Kitchens By Design building the clinic would be open soon.

Part of the reasoning for opening the Quincy Hill Community Health Center, Jaksic said, was to eliminate the need for people to travel to the organization's other clinics in Ewen, Crystal Falls and Gwinn.

Costs for use of clinic services will be based on a sliding-fee scale, Jaksic said. For those who qualify financially and by family size, a client could get \$250 worth of service for \$10, but that cost could go up.

The initial plan was to open the clinic first with medical and behavioral health services. Eventually, the plan was to also provide dental services and a pharmacy.

Although mental health services have been offered in the building for about one year, Jaksic said there has been delays in getting the other services, particularly dental care, in place.

The delay in providing dental care was due largely to a change in funding, Jaksic said.

"The state eliminated the adult dental care from Medicaid," she said.

The funding for adult dental care was eventually put back in place by the state, Jaksic said, but while it was eliminated, it required UPARHS to shift its costs, meaning dental care, which is the largest segment of the services provided by the organization, could not be put in place at the local clinic as soon as intended.

"We had to pull back," she said.

Another delay for putting dental care services into the clinic involved a delay in getting equipment from the organization's Ewen clinic, which got new equipment, Jaksic said. That still-useable equipment is in storage until the remodeling of the building on U.S. 41 can be completed. Work is expected to begin after deer season and continue through the winter.

Although the building in which the clinic will be located was initially leased, Jaksic said in April 2010, it was bought causing another delay in opening.



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Jaksic said part of the process to get the clinic ready for opening involved communicating with local residents about what kinds of services would be desired at the clinic, and they've been very forthcoming.

"You don't see that always," she said.

Local medical providers were contacted, also, to let them know it was not the intention to take their clients, but rather to provide care for those who don't have insurance or those with insurance but without a medical care provider.

"There's always somebody out there who just hasn't accessed service," she said.

Some people haven't had medical care for as many as 20 or 30 years due to financial concerns, Jaksic said.

In the last two years, due in part to the loss of jobs, Jaksic said the UPARHS has seen a doubling of people using their sliding fee payment system.

"It's actually getting worse," she said.

Officials with Aspirus Keweenaw Hospital agreed to provide medical professionals for the clinic, and Jaksic said they still intend to be part of the effort.

"They've been very patient (waiting for the clinic to open)," she said.

Jaksic said it's expected the clinic will be fully operational sometime in 2012.

Officials with UPARHS are working to make the Quincy Hill Community Health Center the best it can be, Jaksic said.

"We want it to be a quality place," she said.

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