

The News-Gazette

Third free clinic opens in Champaign

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CHAMPAIGN – A third free clinic to serve people without health insurance has opened in Champaign.

The Avicenna Community Health Center, a venture of the local Muslim community, opened in late January in the same building housing two other free clinics – the Champaign County Christian Health Center and Hope Community Health Center – at 507 S. Second St., C.

All three clinics are open limited hours and staffed with volunteer medical professionals.

Avicenna is open only on weekends for now, and is serving adults 18 and older of all faiths, according to Irfan Ahmad, a University of Illinois research scientist serving as president of Avicenna's board.

Ahmad said local Muslims came together about a year ago to begin planning for a new clinic after seeing a need for more free health care in Champaign-Urbana.

"We see this as a good opportunity to serve the community," he said.

Ahmad said the new clinic was planned in cooperation with the other two free clinics and Frances Nelson Health Center, a federally qualified health center in Champaign.

Avicenna Community Health Center is sharing space with the Christian Health Center, opening at times the Christian Health Center is closed, Ahmad said.

But Avicenna has a niche of its own by focusing on hypertension, obesity and diabetes care, prevention and education, Ahmad said.

"We want to bring to the table the issue of preventive medicine," he added.

The clinic has a nutritionist available to counsel patients and seven doctor volunteers from Carle Clinic, Christie Clinic, UI McKinley Health Center and Decatur Memorial Hospital, Ahmad said. Other volunteers include Carle pharmacists, UI medical students and some nonmedical volunteers helping with other tasks.

The clinic is looking for more volunteers who are multilingual and appreciative of other cultures, he said.

"We see this as a total interfaith, academia, community-wide partnership," he added.

Avicenna (the Latinized name of famed Muslim physician and physicist Ibn Sina) Community Health Center is just getting started, and will be launched formally in early March, Ahmad said.

For now, it is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. each Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. each Sunday, with calls for appointments taken between 5:30 and 9:30 p.m. Thursdays. The appointment line number is 418-5888.

Ahmad said the board is working on lining up additional funding beyond what has been raised through members of the local Muslim community.

Having three free clinics in the same building is a bit confusing to patients sometimes, but seems to be working fairly well, said Dr. Cris Medrano, the founder of Hope Community Health Center and currently its only physician.

Medrano said she is currently seeing patients only on Wednesdays, and is offering primary medical care to children and adults.

Currently, she is seeing a lot of patients with mental health issues and dental pain who are unable to access care elsewhere, she said.

<http://www.news-gazette.com/news/miscellaneous/2010-02-05/third-free-clinic-opens-champaign.html>

www.avicennahealth.org