

Equal treatment

Swedish opens free specialty clinic for low-income patients

By TOM FUCOLORO
Contributing Writer

Instead of private examination rooms, the uninsured and underinsured patients in need of specialty care in Seattle got gurneys and curtains.

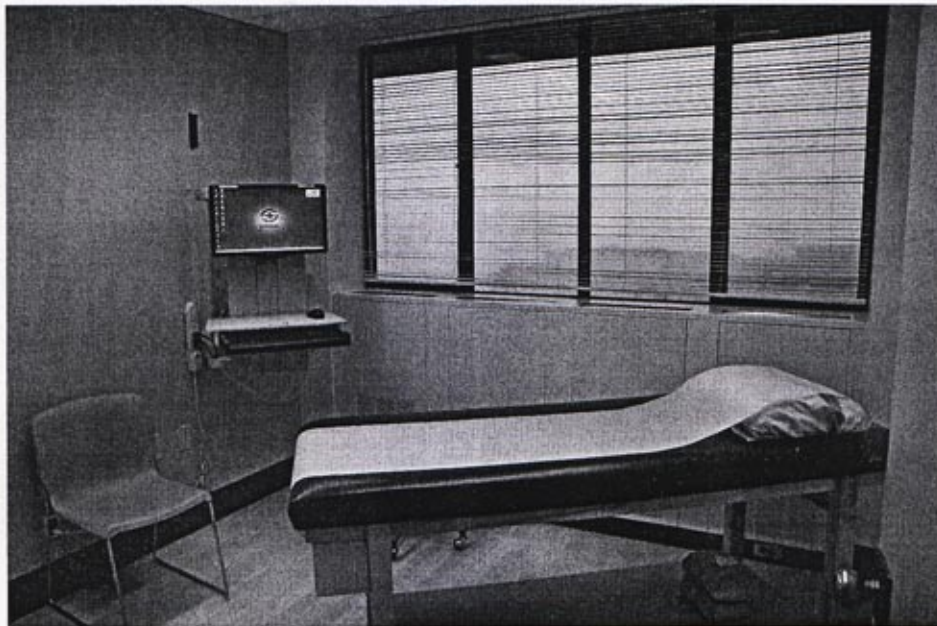
"If a patient had something to say that was very confidential, everybody knew it," says Dr. Rayburn Lewis, who helped start what would become the Mother Joseph Clinic in 2002. The clinic has since provided low-income people an opportunity for specialty treatment like orthopedics, dermatology and podiatry that are beyond the scope of a general practitioner.

Now, the Mother Joseph Clinic has moved out of its basement in Cherry Hill to combine with the Glaser Surgical Clinic in a new space in Swedish Medical Center on First Hill. As Dr. Lewis puts it, the Specialty Clinic treats a low-income person as "an equal patient."

Greg Lewis experienced this treatment first hand after he hurt his leg playing basketball at Judkins Park. Greg, who is recovering from alcohol and crack cocaine habits, was ar-

rested a year ago along with 11 others to protest the Port of Seattle's eviction of Nickelsville, where he lived. But in order to get back on his feet, Greg will need his legs.

Greg went two weeks after getting hurt before he finally got a call telling him to get ready for surgery. "That two weeks seemed like forever," he says.



Low income patients in need of specialty care used to be seen in a basement with no privacy. Now they can get treatment at Swedish's new Community Specialty Clinic. Photo by Tom Fucoloro

Swedish Community Specialty Clinic

Heath Building
801 Broadway, Suite 901
Seattle, WA 98122

Clinic Hours

Mon. - Fri., 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

After his experience, Greg was eager to praise the Specialty Clinic staff. "The people are really phenomenal," he says. "They go out of the way to help you."

But the patient experience is not the only improvement the Specialty Clinic brings. It is also easier for primary care physicians to refer patients to specialty services. The four-year-old nonprofit organization King County Project Access (KCPA) handles the referral process.

"We kind of help glue the family practitioner and the appropriate specialty," says Sallie Neillie, Executive Director of KCPA. She said the new clinic makes the referral process more consistent among the different specialty services. It is also more visible now, which has made it easier for physicians to volunteer their time and expertise. Much of the work in the clinics is performed by volunteers.

Aside from the social justice aspect of providing specialty treatment to low-income people, the new clinic makes financial sense for Swedish. It costs less to treat someone while that person can be an outpatient than it does to wait until the problem gets worse and the patient must spend time in the ER, says Jay Fathi, medical director of primary care outreach and community health for Swedish. ■