

Affordable health care coming to a clinic — or school — near you

By Mike O'Neal
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Catoosa and Walker counties' non-profit Primary Healthcare Centers have a well-established record of providing affordable, comprehensive health care in northwest Georgia.

PHC has remained dedicated to the notion of improving the health care status of its patients and their communities by making quality primary health care services available to everyone — regardless of their ability to pay — since its founding in 1978, according to CEO Diana Allen.

PHC is unique in its offering equal services to the insured, the underinsured and private pay/uninsured at clinics in Trenton, Rossville, Cedartown and Summerville.

"We use a sliding scale based on income as well as taking Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance," Allen said.

Throughout its more than 36-year history, PHC has championed a holistic approach to medical care, one that considers a patient's mental and social conditions as well as physical symptoms.

Not only do they treat the whole person, PHC tries to treat whole families.

That is why the addition of school-based health care centers has been so important to the PHC mission of treating the underserved.

Tiger Creek Elementary School in Catoosa



Diana Allen is CEO of Primary Healthcare Centers at the administrative office in LaFayette. (Messenger photo/Mike O'Neal)

County has operated an in-school clinic for more than a year, one that serves not only students but their parents and siblings as well.

Sandy Matheson, community liaison for PHC, said a pediatric treatment at the clinic will often be followed by other family members visiting for their own health care needs.

"We are a full-service, full-family medical center," she said.

sources and Services Administration grant is allowing not only opening a clinic but also making a mobile dental clinic available for use by students throughout the county.

As director of operations for Catoosa County Schools, Damon Raines had first-hand experience with PHC's services. That is why he approached PHC about a similar school-based family clinic upon his being hired as Walker schools superintendent.

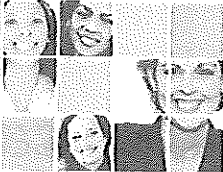
Gilbert met all the criteria required for a federally funded clinic: it had a high percentage of Title I students,

was in a medically underserved community and its clients have limited access to medical care.

"A healthy child is a child in school, one that is getting an education," Matheson said.

Another benefit of having school-based medical care is that it allows a parent to continue working and not having to take time off to shuttle a sick child to the doctor's office — sometimes that means the sick child's siblings are also checked out for the day — and it is seldom that once a

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About Primary Healthcare Centers

Primary Healthcare Centers (PHC) is a not-for-profit, 501 (c)-3, board-directed, Federally Qualified Healthcare Center (FQHC) founded in 1978. PHC is dedicated to improving the health status of its patients and community by providing accessible, affordable, primary health care, general dentistry, behavioral health services, and health outreach and education to everyone, regardless of ability to pay.

At a glance

What: Primary Healthcare Center, a not-for-profit Federally Qualified Healthcare Center founded in 1978 and dedicated to improving the health of anyone in the community.

Where: Walker County office is located in Rossville, one block west of McFarland Avenue at 1430 Suggs St. and will soon open a LaFayette clinic at Gilbert Elementary School. The Dade County office is at 13570 N. Main Street/U.S. Highway 11 in Trenton. Catoosa County's office is at Tiger Creek Elementary School located at 134 Rhea McClanahan Drive in Tunnel Hill. The Polk County office can be found at 118 E. Girard Ave, in Cedartown. The Summerville office can be found at 11638 U.S. Highway 27.

Services: Primary health care, general dentistry and behavioral health services provided regardless of ability to pay.

For more information: Call 706-866-5520 or visit primaryhealthcarecenter.org to obtain information about services available and hours of operation at the various offices.

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child is taken from class that they will return the same day. An absence for one child can mean multiple kids missing class.

"Health and education go hand in hand," Matheson said.

A major component of keeping students healthy is providing dental care, Allen said.

Medical professionals regard dental care as critical to overall health.

Tooth and gum infec-

tions can complicate treatment of other illnesses and can contribute sickness and absenteeism.

And, as part of its holistic approach, PHC staff include nutritionists who will help educate the benefits of a healthy diet. Not only can proper nutrition help prevent tooth decay, it can help the treatment of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood-pressure and lead to weight control.

"We're trying to be the medical home for all those in our community," Allen said.

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