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Health center becomes refuge in economic slump

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Thousands of Philadelphia residents are turning to 11th Street Health Services of Drexel University for their medical needs.

The center, which is run in partnership between Drexel's College of Nursing and Health Professions and the Family Practice and Counseling Network, offers primary, behavioral and dental care and an array of chronic disease management, health promotion and wellness services.

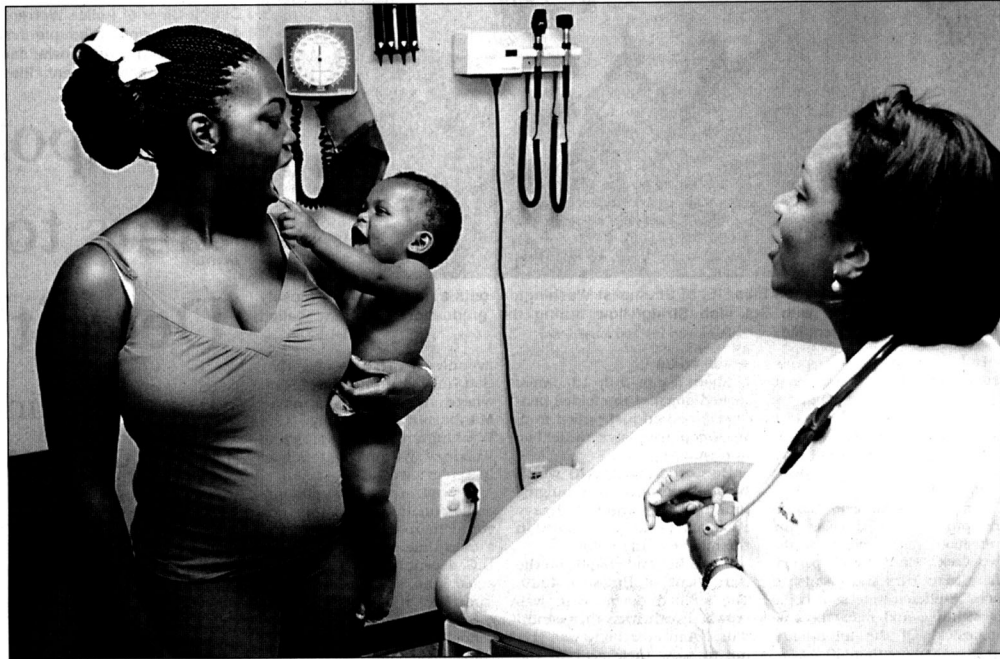
Led by Patricia Garrity, Drexel's associate dean for community programs, the center specializes in offering a transdisciplinary model of care.

"One of the biggest parts of that is we've integrated behavioral health right into primary care, so it's seamless," Garrity said.

"You might come into a specific department, but there is interaction among everybody here. I think that one of the things that sets us apart is the providers work across disciplines."

In keeping with its holistic focus on patient care, 11th Street offers services such as rapid HIV testing, fitness center access, parent education classes, chronic illness management, yoga courses and cooking classes where participants learn how to prepare healthy meals. Some of the meals are prepared with the harvest from the center's outdoor garden that is tended by members of Teens 4 Good.

Pregnant patients who visit the center are encouraged to tap into their "Centering Pregnancy" program where they interact with one another and receive group prenatal care. The center is also a part of the Nurse Family Partnership collaborative — a program that provides nurse vis-



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its to women who are having their first baby.

"People need access to clinical services but they need also access to opportunities to learn and to try out healthy choices," Garrity pointed out.

"We expose people to different things so healthier choices become easier."

For instance, the center is developing a public health campaign titled "Think Before You Drink," where staff will be working with residents and storeown-

ers in the community to reduce consumption of sweetened beverages, particularly in light of the high obesity rates.

Evelyn Glover serves an example of a patient who has made healthier decisions since she started visiting the center. Glover, who has been a patient for the last four years, is diabetic.

"My diabetes were out of whack," she admitted.

Since she enrolled in the center's diabetes management classes, Glover keeps her blood sugar

at a healthier level and prepares healthier meals. She also took advantage of the center's exercise and knitting classes.

"This center really helps you in the long run," said Glover, who is a resident of Yorktown and a member of the center's Community Advisory Board.

Facilities like 11th Street were being highlighted during National Health Centers Week, observed

Aug. 9-15. The observance recognizes the service that community, migrant, homeless and public housing health centers provide to individuals, regardless of their ability to pay. According to the National Association of Community Health Centers, of the 17 million patients relying on these facilities, one in four is low-income and minority.

"We want our patients to realize

that we are a part of that whole network of care across the country and not only here in the community. We're here for those who need us most. Community health systems are a vital part of the health-care system," Franks said.

"Our real focus is creating medical homes for our patients so that they really know that they can get comprehensive care and in-depth services right here in their neighborhood at one location. Every person who works here — their goal is to ensure that our patients are treated with respect. We want to build their trust."

In the last year, the center located at 850 N. 11th St. has been faced with an increased demand for services. Due to the economic downturn, 11th Street is seeing an influx of patients who lost their jobs and health insurance. Last year, the center had over 24,000 patient visits, with 12,000 visits accounting for primary care services. While 11th Street primarily serves the four public housing developments that lie in close proximity, patients come from all over the city.

"There's a tremendous need," Gerrity said. "The need is growing."

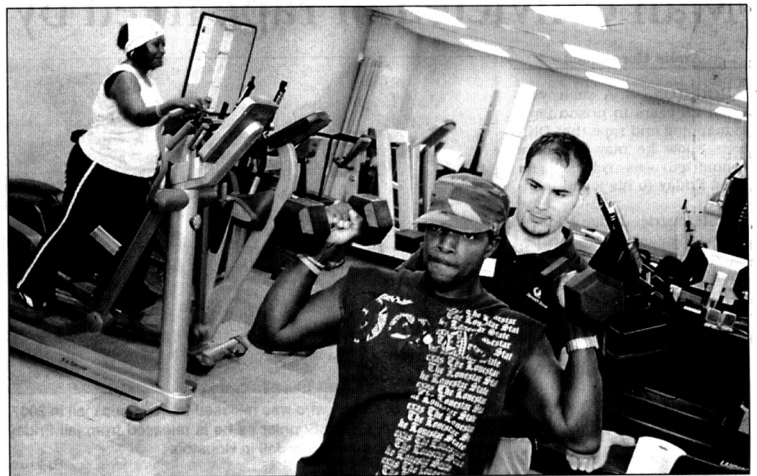
The center's adoption of an open access scheduling process has led to more patient visits. Under open access scheduling, patients call and make appointments on the day they need to be seen.

According to Gerrity, the two-floor facility is at full capacity and funds are needed to expand the center by another 10,000 feet.

A larger space would enable 11th Street to offer more primary care services, launch a family counseling program and bring in more specialists.



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