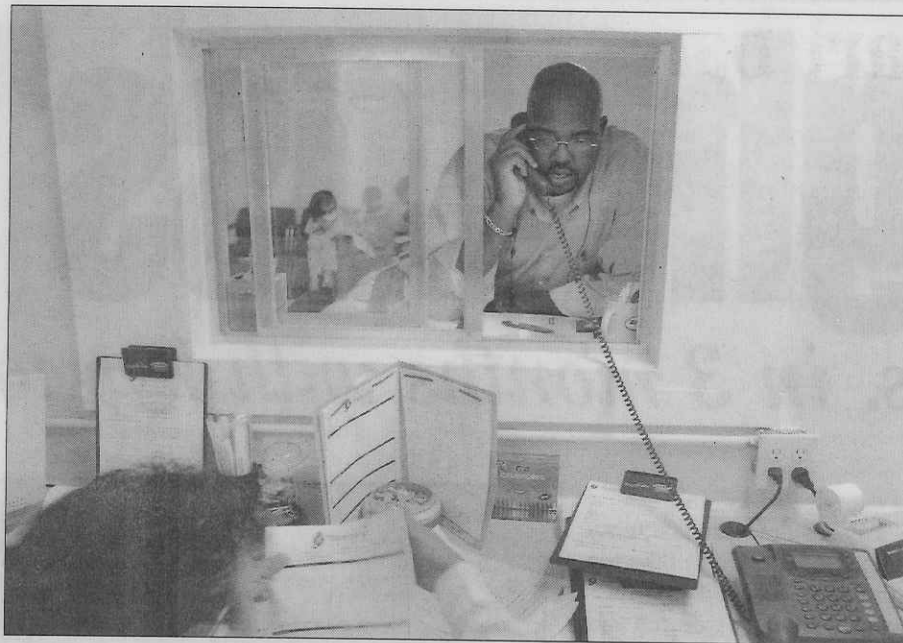


Ray A. Coleman, founder of Tapestry Healthcare, answered a question from a client who called the clinic on Thursday evening. "We don't turn anybody away," he says.



SMILEY N. POOL/Staff Photographer

Clinics offering low-cost, free health care to poor, uninsured

Continued from Page 1B

try's volunteer clinical director. "As soon as we opened that door, we got flooded."

Tapestry's physicians have treated everything from sniffles and earaches to broken bones and high blood pressure.

"We're strapped for [operational] funds," said Dr. Procter, who has also contributed financially to the cause. "But failure is not an option. We're going to do everything we can to keep this thing afloat."

More than 78,000 people living in Collin County are estimated to lack health insurance, according to a comprehensive study by the Dallas/Fort Worth Hospital Council in 2002.

Tapestry officials said that in McKinney alone, about 15,000 residents are underinsured and fall through the cracks because they can't afford traditional means of health care.

In desperation, many of them wind up in area hospital emergency rooms, where they wait for hours to receive nonemergency care.

At Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, for instance, more than 4,700 Collin County residents — mainly the working poor — were treated during fiscal 2002, according to Parkland officials, who are in the process of updating those figures.

"Even if we doubled the number of clinics, we still would not fill the need that we have in this county," said Mary Alice Garza, a member of Collin County Area Interfaith. The organization has urged Collin County commissioners to spend more on indigent health care.

Under current guidelines, a single person can't make more than \$185 a month to qualify for county health care, and a family of four can't make more than \$377. Those figures are based on federal poverty standards.

County tapped out

Collin County commissioners have said repeatedly that the county can't afford to pay more, given rising medical and personnel costs for the current coverage.

This fiscal year, the county expects to spend \$2.2 million treating more than 400 low-income people.

Sensing an impasse, Ms. Garza said interfaith members are starting to reach out to existing clinics to "see how we can support each other. Because we are not in competition with each other," she said. "We do not believe that there are enough services available."

Plano Children's Medical Clinic, founded in 1991, was the first volunteer clinic to serve disadvantaged children in Collin County.

Last year, poor children who were eligible for government insurance programs such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insur-

COLLIN COUNTY FACILITIES

Collin County is home to a few clinics for uninsured or low-income people.

TAPESTRY HEALTHCARE

Location: 402 N. Tennessee St. (southwest corner of Lamar and Tennessee) in McKinney

Hours: 6 to 9 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays; 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays

Payment: Sliding-scale fee, based on income and family size.

Medicare, Medicaid and other medical insurance are accepted.

Contact: 1-888-540-7701 or 972-540-7700,

www.tapestryhealthcare.org

Established: Feb. 24

COLLIN COUNTY ADULT CLINIC

Location: 1100 W. 15th St., Suite 210, Plano (southwest corner of 15th and Alma) in Plano

Hours: Thursday evenings, a limited number of patients seen beginning at 6:30 p.m. Closed on holidays.

Payment: Medical services provided at no charge. Patients are asked for a \$10 donation to help defray administrative costs.

Contact: 972-679-0035,

www.CollinCountyAdultClinic.org

Established: March 2003

PLANO CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CLINIC

Location: 1407 14th St. in Plano

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Mondays through Fridays (closed from noon to 1 p.m.). A clinic for uninsured children opens at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Payment: The night clinic is for children in Collin County who have no insurance. Five dollars is requested with proof of residency.

Contact: 972-801-9689

Established: October 1991

CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER OF MCKINNEY

Location: Site planned at North Central Medical Center, Wysong Campus, 130 S. Central Expressway in McKinney

Contact: 972-562-1707

Established: Plans to open in August

ance Program made 12,000 office visits to the clinic during the day. An additional 6,000 visits were made by those who had no insurance.

"Medicines will be a big factor for these new clinics because it's a big factor for us," said Susan Shuler, Plano Children's Medical Clinic's executive director. "If you have an asthmatic child, their asthma medicine can run up to \$150 a month. While you rely heavily on donations from pharmaceutical [companies] to help you out, [they] will not be able to help you out totally."

Filling the gap

About a year ago, the Collin County Adult Clinic in Plano stepped in to help fill a gap. Affiliated with Catholic Charities, it has served 880 people in the last year in a total of 1,782 visits. Prospective patients line up hours before the clinic opens in classroom space donated by St. Mark's Catholic Church on Thursday nights.

"We see about 45 to 55 patients a night, and unfortunately turn away about half as many people because of the limited amount of time," said Jerry Weis, who serves on the clinic's operations committee. "It's not fair to the doctors [to keep them there more than three or four hours]. They're volunteering their time and have a regular day schedule, too."

Mary Nelle Cummins, a longtime McKinney volunteer, is the president of the board of the proposed Children and Community Health Center, a faith-based clinic.

She said the impetus for the clinic began with a dream she had to provide basic health care for the

medically underserved children of McKinney. The dream has since expanded to include their parents.

Ms. Cummins and her board have been quietly working to build a strong base of support.

"We can open with \$100,000," she said, adding that she's confident that goal reach can be reached by August.

"Everyone who has heard our story is most supportive. I'm getting three to five calls a day from people who want to be a part of it."

She said the big difference between her clinic and Tapestry is that "we will never charge. Ours will be totally free at all times."

Most of the sick people waiting in Tapestry's lobby late last week said they learned of the 2-week-old clinic by word of mouth.

"If you don't have insurance and lots of money, most doctors won't see you," said Karen Pitts, one of about a dozen patients Thursday night.

Ms. Pitts, 54, of Anna, who is uninsured, complained of chest pains. She said she's supposed to be on thyroid medicine but she's not, because she can't afford it. When she and her daughter left the clinic about 9:30 p.m., she had medication and an appointment for a follow-up visit in a week. Ms. Pitts, who works part time at the post office, said she paid \$22 for everything.

"I was a long time there, but I have no gripes about that," she said. "That doctor could be at home doing other things. So could the people who work at the front office. I'm just tickled pink!"