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Clinic's doors open to all who need care

By MARIAN SCHINSKE
Contributor

With her credentials, Dr. Tracey Hessel could have worked anywhere in the United States, but she followed her wish to serve families with financial needs. That led her to serve as the lead pediatrician for the Marin Community Clinics facility in Novato.

"I like having a comprehensive relationship with people over time, and that's why I enjoy pediatrics," Hessel said, adding that she feels good to be working at a clinic that offers affordable, high-quality care — especially now, during these tough economic times.



TIM OMARZU/MARINSCOPE

Dr. Tracey Hessel stands in front of the Marin Community Clinics facility in Novato where she works as lead pediatrician.

Although Marin County is one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, there are

pockets of real poverty. Hessel said she sees families from all walks of life, from those at the top who have temporarily lost their jobs and health insurance to those living below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

"Our doors are open to anyone who needs our care," she said.

"This is not a free clinic, but we have a sliding scale based on annual income and family size," she said. "Also, people can pay out of pocket. We provide a medical home for the uninsured and underinsured, but we're also a good option for people who have found themselves temporarily without insurance. We can make sure their ongoing issues and preventive care continue to be addressed in the interim."

Besides the Novato clinic, the Marin Community Clinics also have facilities in Greenbrae and San Rafael. The Novato clinic offers a variety of services, including urgent care, primary care for kids and adults, immunizations, reproductive health, mental health, chronic disease management and chiropractic care. Beginning in October, dental care will be provided.

"We don't just want to take care of people's immediate health needs; we want to make sure we're helping them reach their whole health potential," Hessel said. "A lot of what we're doing is connecting people with resources, support and information. As far as kids go, we try to get them connected with their environment so that they're happy and interested. We connect them with resources at the schools and after-school programs, but due to the economy, these resources are shrinking. This just reinforces our role to really try to provide support."

It's hard for Hessel to stop working at the end of the day, because her goal is to help kids meet needs that are beyond medical care. Much of her time is spent networking with folks from other nonprofits and public-service agencies, trying to see if anyone can enrich her patients' lives.

Happily, the extra layers of administrative work have not crushed her spirit. Hessel has been helping children here for seven years, and she hopes to keep working in Novato for many more.

Despite the challenges facing the city of Novato, Hessel said she thinks that people here are determined to make things work, and make things work better.

"There's a lot of collaboration that goes on here, and I really like that. And although you notice that Novato is a big town, you're just surrounded by beautiful hills and this probably contributes to everyone's health."

- The Marin Community Clinics Novato facility is located at 6100 Redwood Blvd. For medical appointments, call 448-1500. For dental appointments, call 526-8555.