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Hearts That Care Health Clinic is building bridges

The Hearts That Care Health Clinic of Lawton wants to build bridges to do more.

CHRISTINE EASTWOOD

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Dr. Dan Joyce, director of the clinic, said Hearts That Care is the only free clinic in the region Oklahoma and the only one in the state of Oklahoma involved in hepatitis C management.

The Hearts That Care Health Clinic, 304 SW A, serves uninsured and lowincome persons in Comanche, Cotton, Tillman and Caddo Counties. Joyce said the need is so great that patients will wait up to eight hours to be seen and receive medication.

"They will line up outside as early as 7 a.m. to sign up for an appointment at 9 a.m.," he said.

The clinic has 474 active patients whose average income is \$7,632.

The staff - all volunteers

- includes four primary care physicians, a cardiologist, two physician assistants, a nurse practitioner and physicians in residency programs.

Joyce said Hearts That Care is able to provide preventive care, such as monitoring and treating diabetes to postpone dialysis, which lowers the cost of care.

Half of the clinic's budget goes directly for paying for purchasing meters, medical supplies and medication, Joyce said. The United Way of Lawton-Fort Sill is providing \$50,000 this year; Southwestern Medical Center provides lab work, and Taliaferro Community MentalH Health Center provides free counseling and is able to "co-treat" with medication because the clinic does not provide controlled substances.

Joyce said Hearts That Care Health Clinic would like to continue to "build bridges" with other service providers like Calvary Baptist Church, which has a once-a-month dental clinic.

Hearts That Care would like to expand its services with a dentist and an ophthalmologist, Joyce said, and it also would like to have more space. It now has one 8-by-10-foot exam rooms and two 6-by-10-foot exam rooms.

The clinic is open the first and third Thursday of each month at 9 a.m. for appointments. Patients are asked to take a picture ID, proof of residency and proof of entire household income.

To contact the clinic call 354-9007.