

Novato nonprofit medical clinic expands amid ‘shocking’ surge in demand

By Adrian Rodriguez, Marin Independent Journal

| POSTED: 07/10/16, 12:03 PM PDT

Twelve-year-old Leslie Capriel, of Novato, was happy to hear she is cavity free.

Thursday was her first visit to the Marin Community Clinic’s expanded dental wing, which is part of a bigger \$4 million development that opened last month at the Novato center that serves the low-income community.

“We see mostly children, because that is the opportunity for prevention,” said Dr. John Boland, dentist and chairman of the board of directors that governs the nonprofit. “By the time the kids are young adults, hopefully we’ve helped them develop good habits to stay healthy.”

Once the full renovation is complete, the new 13,350-square-foot clinic at 6090 Redwood Blvd. will provide dental services seven days a week — including treatment to the homeless on Sundays under an agreement with the county of Marin and Ritter Center — with nine state-of-the-art dental chairs.

The expanded center is adjacent to the clinic that has been in operation since 2009. It will also provide family medicine, pediatric care and other services, all to meet the growing demand of patients.

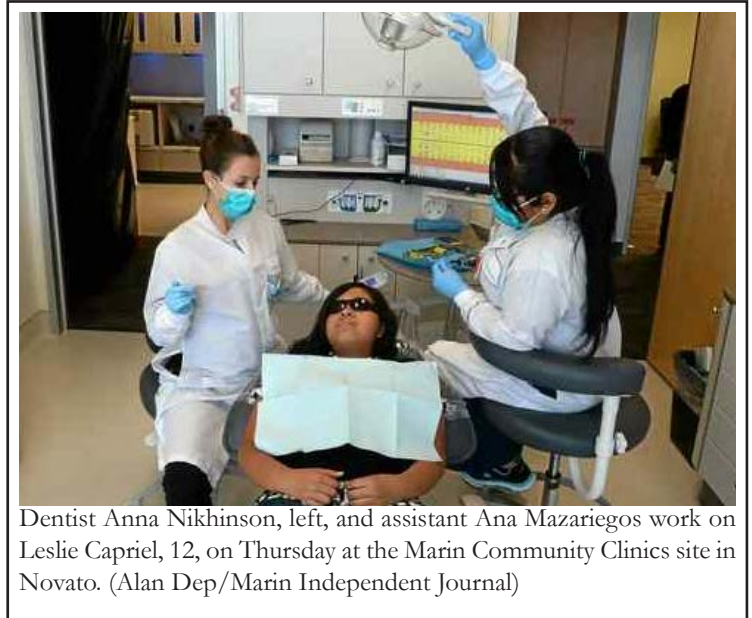
Linda Tavaszi, Marin Community Clinics’ CEO, said the Novato clinic sees about 11,000 patients a year, but there are about 4,000 others it has yet to serve.

“We cannot work fast enough to keep up,” she said. “The growth is amazing. It’s shocking and thrilling at the same time.”

Novato is federally designated as a “medically underserved area” and 20 percent of Novato’s population is low income, Tavaszi said.

Some of the 19 new exam rooms have been equipped with tables that weigh patients — which Susan Wiebers, clinic director, said is key for treating the elderly and developmentally disabled patients.

The \$4 million project is being financed through a combination of Marin Community Clinics assets and donations. There have been more than \$1 million in donations from community members, the county of Marin and organizations such as the Marin Community Foundation.



Dentist Anna Nikhinson, left, and assistant Ana Mazariegos work on Leslie Capriel, 12, on Thursday at the Marin Community Clinics site in Novato. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

The expansion also allows the Novato clinic to offer radiology services for the first time, which Tavaszi called “a deal made in heaven.”

“The big need is quick service,” said Tavaszi, describing the cumbersome process of being treated for broken bones. “We can’t do anything until you have X-rays. ... That means sitting in the ER waiting room for them to take care of the heart attacks ... get the X-ray and have to come back.”

Tavaszi said that since August of last year, when its San Rafael site first offered the service, the clinics have performed more than 950 X-rays.

“Which means all those people didn’t have to go to hospitals — and those charges are like a gazillion dollars,” she said.

The new facility also has a blood lab, lactation education and counseling, developmental screening and behavioral support for pediatric patients and their families, and health education rooms, which will be new to the Novato campus.

Dr. Elizabeth Shaw, the site medical director, said the additions and facility layout are “all about team-based care.”

Tavaszi added, “We try to be a full-service multidisciplinary clinic focused on prevention first and treatment later.”

MCC has five medical clinics: two in Novato, two in San Rafael’s Canal neighborhood and one in Larkspur. One of MCC’s Novato clinics provides confidential teen services.

MCC has an annual budget of \$37 million.

Expanded Medi-Cal eligibility from the Affordable Care Act has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of patients receiving care at the Marin Community Clinics.

In 2015, Marin Community Clinics had approximately 35,000 patients and 161,128 patient visits, including both medical and dental treatments. In 2008, before MCC began treating large numbers of dental patients, it had 51,990 patient visits.

MCC leaders will celebrate a grand opening at 8 a.m. Aug. 10.



The Novato office of Marin Community Clinics handles about 11,000 patients a year. Above, patient Iliana Jarquin of Novato talks with Dr. Mark Schwartz after an exam there Thursday. (Alan Dep/Marin IJ)