

Health clinic moves to prominent locale downtown

By ERIC GNECKOW

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St. Joseph Health has relocated a former clinic on the outskirts of Petaluma to a high-profile location along East Washington Street, a revamped facility that will eventually offer expanded hours over the typical doctor's office.

The new office at 905 East Washington St. is part of a broader strategy for the health care provider in Sonoma County, where a handful of "after-hours" clinics are offering primary care during the evenings and weekends, said Bob Just, chief operating officer for St. Joseph Heritage Healthcare in Northern California, which operates physicians offices for St. Joseph in the region.

The expanded hours are expected to ramp up later this year, he said.

"There's really nothing open after 5 p.m. except for the emergency room, and we knew that wasn't always the best place for people to receive their care," Just said.

It will be the fourth such office for St. Joseph Health in Sonoma County, following other after-hours clinics in Santa Rosa, Windsor and Sebastopol. The provider also operates Petaluma Valley Hospital, and its affiliated physicians group has 12 practices in Petaluma.

The approach is distinct from St. Joseph's "urgent care" clinics, he said, which are set up to provide periodic care for a range of acute issues like broken bones and sickness. The new office won't provide those sorts of acute services, but rather the kind of ongoing care one would obtain from a regular doctor.

"Normally with urgent care, you treat them once, and they're gone," he said. "We would really like to have our practice serve as a primary care for patients, so if they see us on an acute basis, they will come back for their ongoing care as well."

Just said a significant percentage of patients that walk in to see a doctor at St. Joseph's after-hours clinics end up settling into a longterm relationship with a regular physician.

The opening of the new location in July comes with the closure of a previous physician's office at 24 West El Rose Dr. in Petaluma, Just said. The new office has approximately twice the usable space for patient care, and will eventually be the home of two physicians and two nurse practitioners.

The practice currently features one physician and nurse practitioner, is open Monday through Friday during regular business hours. The schedule will expand after the recruitment of additional staff, he said.

The launch of the new office comes at a time of change for the physician's groups affiliated with St. Joseph Health in Sonoma, Napa and Humboldt counties. The groups will now operate under a single name, St. Joseph Health Medical Group, dispensing with separate names that included Annadel Medical Group in Sonoma County.

"We've had a lot of private practices join us over the years, and patients didn't always know that these were part of St. Joseph Health and part of a much broader area," he said. "People like to know they are part of a larger organization with lots of resources available, not just single doctors."

The overall group now encompasses 227 providers and around 600 support staff across 70 locations in Sonoma, Napa and Humboldt counties, according to an announcement from St. Joseph Health.

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A clinic operated by St. Joseph Health is now open on East Washington Street.