

## **Tigard High Health Center on track to self-sufficiency**

**By Ellen Gilmer, The Oregonian**

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As it starts its second full year of service, the Tigard High Health Center is on track to becoming financially self-supporting, officials say.

The clinic, which opened at the high school in March 2008, is one of a growing number of school-based health centers that aim to provide physical and mental services to students who may or may not have health insurance.

The clinic, a satellite of Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center of Hillsboro, serves all students in the Tigard-Tualatin School District. With an annual budget of \$250,000, it provides services ranging from sports physicals to immunizations, from treatment of minor illnesses to wellness counseling.

Gil Muñoz, Virginia Garcia's CEO, says he hopes the center can show it is sustainable by the end of this school year.

Since its launch a year and a half ago, the clinic has received funding from Providence Partners in Health, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, the Washington County Department of Health and Human Services, Mental Health and Public Health, and other supporters.

Margaret Stochosky, a nurse practitioner and one of three staff members at the clinic, says plans are for the clinic to become completely independent and able to run as any other business would, without grant assistance.

Muñoz said the goal is to have enough insured students using the services that their payments subsidize services for the uninsured.

The center, which has served 697 students since it opened, is reaching its goal for volume of clinic visitors, he said, but has not achieved the required balance between insured and uninsured. Currently, 35 percent are insured through the Oregon Health Plan, 13 percent have private insurance, 49 percent are uninsured and the remaining 3 to 4 percent are uncategorized.

Stochosky says the staff encourages families to sign up for the Oregon Health Plan if they qualify. If more families get on the health plan, the clinic might be closer to reaching its desired insurance balance.

"I talk to so many parents every day," Stochosky said. "They're finding that this is a great resource in the community."

Stochosky is certain the center is providing care for kids who might not otherwise have it. Uninsured students receive care at heavily discounted rates and are given flexible payment plans for the balance.

Having no money should not be a barrier to care, Stochosky said.

Oregon has 55 school-based health centers, according to the state department of human services, including two others in Washington County, at Forest Grove High School and Merlo Station High School in the Beaverton School District.

-- Ellen Gilmer