

# Clinic tries to increase access to care

By DARLA WELLES  
The Journal

A new Golden Valley Health Center office has opened its doors at 777 E. Hawkeye Ave.

Housed in a new medical office building, the health center is a branch of Golden Valley Health Centers, a private, nonprofit corporation based in Merced.

The corporation was founded in 1972 as Merced Family Health Center and now operates 13 medical and dental practices in Merced and Stanislaus counties.

As a federally funded community health center, it is an outgrowth of federal efforts begun more than two decades ago to meet the needs of migrant workers and other indigent health care consumers, according to its executive director, Mike Sullivan.

While those programs' roles have evolved since they were begun in the 1970s, Sullivan said their primary focus has not changed.

"Our doors are open to everyone," he said. "But our goal remains, now as it was then, to provide access to care to those who might otherwise slip through the cracks of the system."

Those patients include the working poor, who have little or no health insurance coverage, and those feel excluded from the mainstream by lan-



Glenn Moore/The Journal

**Bernard Williams checks a file with Catherine Carlos in an exam room at the clinic.**

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Services will be provided to the uninsured on a sliding-fee scale, he said. The centers also welcome MediCal and Medicare patients and those who are covered by private insurance, with fees set accordingly.

The Turlock center has six examining rooms and a mini-laboratory and will also supply medicines at a discount through its pharmacy in Modesto.

Primary care services ranging from prenatal services to geriatrics and pediatrics to women's health care will be available.

Staffing the center initially will be a physician's assistant and one or two nurses, who will work under the supervision of Turlock family practice specialist Dr. Michael Brodie, Sullivan

said.

The physician's assistant will be Bernard Williams, who trained at Stanford Medical Center and who also has prior experience as a nurse. Williams worked at Golden Valley Centers in Los Banos and Gustine.

Williams said most patients will receive care from him under Brodie's guidance. Problem cases will be referred directly to Brodie, who will also take care of patients who require hospitalization.

"A physician's assistant is trained to handle treatment of about 90 percent of cases on his own," Williams said.

He said the health center will work with officials at Emanuel Medical Center and with local

specialists to round out its circle of care.

Both Williams and Sullivan stressed that the center is not intended as a competitor to other local health care providers, but rather as an adjunct to existing service.

"Expanding access to care is the key to our operation," Williams said. "We're especially attuned to meeting the needs of the people whose access to the system is limited by their finances or lack of insurance or because they cannot speak the language."

Health center hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday now, Williams said, and will probably be expanded as the demand for services warrants. For information call 669-3260.