

# Barton turns community clinic into health center

By Kathryn Reed

Walking in the front door it's like entering brand new doctors' offices. Gone is the cramped, dingy reception area. Beyond the waiting area are exam rooms that while sterile in a good way, are welcoming.

And gone is the name. Barton Community Clinic is now Barton Community Health Center.

"It's a better fit for what we provide," Barton spokeswoman Monica Sciuto said of the new name.



Barton Health Care Center on South Avenue in South Lake Tahoe near Barton Memorial Hospital. Photos/Kathryn Reed

It was in 1989 that doctors Paul Rork, Greg Bergner and Martin started the clinic. Barton took over in 1995. Martin is the only one still directly involved with the clinic.

For the past year the clinic-health center has been going through more than just a remodel. It is now a 7,379-square-foot facility. An additional 3,000-square-feet was added to

the existing structure. It went from 11 exam rooms to 18, which includes two procedure rooms.

The front door is on the opposite side of the building. The old front door is now the employee entrance. And what was the waiting room is a doctor's office.

The doors on the \$1.4 million renovation were opened last month, with the official dedication planned for July 27.

Debbie McCarthy, outpatient clinical director, came on board three months ago to head the facility. She also runs Barton Family Medicine.

She didn't get to see what the old facility looked like, but she has heard plenty of stories.

Three hallways divide the care areas. The ob-gyn area is set off in its own area, with an entrance next to the main one. This is so if someone from the general population has chicken pox or something else contagious, the expectant mother will not come in contact with that person.



The reception is more professional than the old clinic.

The plan is to provide services from day one of pregnancy through post partum. Other services are being talked about – like nutrition, adding a social worker, teaching how to breast feed and how to use a car seat.

With the state projecting a 40 percent increase in Medi-Cal patients when the Health Care Reform Act takes effect Jan. 1, Barton Community Health Center knows its numbers will go up as well.

Barton is already doing outreach to let people know about the changes that are coming because of the federal medical reforms, but also plans to do more to reach the community that today is uninsured.

The facility primarily serves the uninsured on the South Shore, along with those on Medi-Cal, Medicare or who have limited insurance.

The center is averaging about 1,200 patients a month, with 1,113 coming in May, the last month numbers are available. Demand for services has been increasing since January 2009. The clinic has treated 1,600 patients in a month.

To help with demand the center is open on Saturdays. But for now, no staff has been added. There are five nurse practitioners, two physician assistants, four registered nurses, two medical assistants, four technician-receptionists, and six receptionists. That would change if the patient numbers spike 40 percent.

(Some jobs are being reclassified as the health center approach is implemented. More training is taking place as needed.)



Exam rooms are new or completely remodeled.

General practitioners come in, as well as specialists, plus there is a growing telemedicine component.

Going from clinic to health center, it's less about giving a patient a pill and sending them home and more about education, prevention and follow-up consultations to cut down on repeat visits.

"It's wellness focused, not illness focused," McCarthy said. "As we get more people who will quality for insurance, we hope they will seek health care and focus more on prevention and a better quality of life."

The medical home model is being looked at. It's about whole care coordination. It's about educating people about their disease, following up with them via telephone, and having an RN on call 24 hours to answer questions.

"Especially with chronic diseases you want quality of life," McCarthy said.

While the center is operating as usual, a few things are still being ironed out. And it is clear the decorating is one of the last items to be addressed.

--

**Notes:**

- Open house on July 27 from 9-11:30am, 2201 South Ave., South Lake Tahoe. There will be tours and free health screenings.
- Funding: Barton Foundation \$137,441; Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary more than \$1 million.
- Barton Health has information online about the Health Care Reform Act. People will be able enroll in the health care exchanges in California and Nevada in October.