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New clinic focuses on bone health

By La RISA LYNCH
Contributing Reporter

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At 7 feet tall, dressed in all black with matching cowboy hat, Dr. Daniel Ivankovich cannot be missed - nor his souped-up jet-black 2007 Dodge Magnum SRT, known as the Bone Squad.

From his car, Ivankovich drives inner city streets providing orthopedic specialty care for needy residents suffering from all kinds of bone ailments, from broken limbs to gunshot wounds.

Now Ivankovich has shifted gears - opening a new medical center in the Austin community that focuses on preventive health care.

Opened in May, OnePatient Global Health Initiative, 5129 W. Jackson, provides the usual staple of health screenings for hypertension, cholesterol and diabetes, but also focuses on bone health as a key to improved wellness.

As an orthopedic surgeon, Ivankovich opened the clinic after seeing other medical ailments that impacted individuals' overall health. Replacing a knee does not solve maladies related to a person's hypertension. Ivankovich wanted to create a clinic that treats the whole person to better improve health outcomes.

"It's all about making transformational changes in people's lives. I live for that," Ivankovich said in an email.

While aches and pains in bones and joints could signal other health issues, bone health often takes a back seat in low-income communities where residents struggle to purchase prescriptions, pay rent or put food on the table, explained Karla Carwile, the clinic's director of outreach and prevention. She is also vice president of OnePatient.

Carwile partnered with Ivankovich to open the health clinic, which has seen a steady stream of patients since its May 1 opening. Many low-income residents ignore hip, neck or shoulder pain that "doesn't really have to be there," she said, adding that a majority of emergency room visits are injuries due to falls.

"I think people look at orthopedics or musculoskeletal health and think: 'Oh, you broke a bone.' That's not the case," Carwile said. "Musculoskeletal health, across the board, is impacted by things like obesity, diabetes, arthritis - all the things that we see in these varied populations ... and these are the people who would never consider some type of specialty care."

Ivankovich and Carwile opened the clinic in Austin, which they say is medically underserved. Carwile noted that Austin is the largest community in Chicago - as big as the state capital - but still lacks basic resources.

"Our goal is to become a federally qualified health clinic," said Carwile, a Springfield native. "Our goal is to be able to provide total wrap-around services [so] if an individual needs dental work, we can work with different programs in the area to make sure that they have what they need."

The clinic offers free health screenings and referral services to other health agencies or physicians to address specific medical conditions. The clinic also provides opportunities to access specialty care. Services are provided regardless of ability to pay or based on a sliding fee scale.

The clinic's goal is prevention through health education. Many health disparities affecting Austin and minority communities are preventable if residents receive the right information, Carwile explained. She cited that the national push to fight obesity rarely informs low-income communities how to read labels, eat right or exercise.

"We tell people: 'You're fat, lose weight,' but we don't tell them how to do that," Carwile said. "It seems to me that a lot of stuff is being marketed to middle white America. ... It's cultural competence. It is understanding a way to reach out into those communities to work with them to educate them on the fact that they have choices."

Education efforts will include weight management, appropriate exercise for arthritis and smoking cessation, which Carwile said are tied to musculoskeletal health.

Carwile networks with churches and community groups to inform them about the clinic's services. The clinic wants to form partnerships and linkages with other neighboring Austin health centers to ensure wrap-around medical services.

Many residents suffer needless medical ailments because they don't know where to go for medical care or how to access the system, Carwile said. Many are unaware or don't know how to use social service programs like Medicaid or disability benefits that could connect them to medical care. The clinic, Carwile said, will help residents apply for those benefits.

"Our role is to facilitate and make sure they understand and that they are educated in their choices and are given choices," Carwile said.

For more information, call 773-675-9900 or visit www.OnePatient.org