

From Donald P. Whitehead, Health Director BHHC

Health care should always be an ever-changing environment. Without change, there is a tendency to stand still. It should be our mission to look for ways to improve, add services, or seek new opportunities to provide care. A health center should not accept things the way they are. Over the past several months, changes have been made at Black Hawk Health Center, some small, some large.

Providers

For many years, BHHC has operated without a full complement of Providers. The current facility was designed to accommodate four (4) Providers. But recruitment has been difficult and finding them harder. Beginning March 2015, BHHC will have four providers that are full time staff of BHHC, two physicians and two physician assistants. This will allow the clinic to have more appointment slots, established patients will see the same provider at every visit, and additional medical services can be provided. Directed by Dr. Eugene Hoyt, Medical Director, the new providers are:

- Dr. Gary Kindell who moved back to Oklahoma from Alaska (see article in the paper)
- Kathy Song, PA hired in December 2014
- Steven Johnston, PA hire date is March 2015 from Colorado Springs, Colorado

**Front Office Reorganization/
Lobby Renovation**

Also in the fall of 2014, the front office was reorganized. The reorganization was implemented in order to better manage patient flow, improve information accuracy, and assist patients and their families to identify and obtain health care coverage. Gathering information on the front end is critical to the total care of the patient. Melanie Niccum is now

scanning in health records to be incorporated in the clinic's Electronic Medical Record. Having documents in electronic format allows providers to easily access all of a patient's health information in one place. We hired a new patient benefits coordinator (PBC), Jessica Buchanan and she immediately increased the number of patients assisted. In January, the PBC completed 473 eligibility checks, and assisted in 29 Medicaid applications.

New lobby furniture was installed to replace torn and worn out chairs. The furniture chosen was selected for two reasons. One, the furniture has arms for the patient to more easily stand. Two, the material can be cleaned to provide a sanitary environment. The walls were painted and a new 55 inch HD TV was installed. The glass panels at the reception desk were removed in order to better communicate up front.

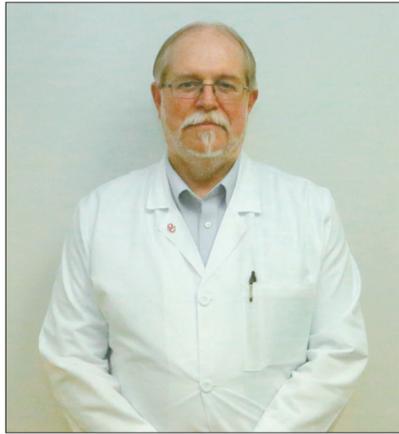
Third Party Billing

Third Party Billing is where BHHC bills insurance companies, Medicare, and Medicaid and receives payments for health care services provided at the clinic. The patient is not responsible for deductibles or co-pays when they receive services here. The payments received from third parties are important because it helps pay for many of the things we have done and will do in the future. With better information collection and patient benefits coordination, this dollar amount could increase.

Wellness Center Exercise Room

The existing workout equipment has been there for a number of years. The equipment wears out and new technology comes along to provide a better workout experience. Five new pieces of equipment will be in place in March and other equipment could be replaced within the next few months.

The Last Frontier – Fond Memories of Medical Practice and Life in Alaska 2008-2014



Gary R. Kindell, MD

In 2008, my wife Sharon (an RN), and I took the opportunity to move to Fairbanks, Alaska where I practiced in a community health center, and she worked in a medical clinic. We packed the U-Haul, drove up through Montana into western Canada, and took the Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek, British Columbia to Fairbanks. While it was a fantastic trip, it was good to have a reason to drive around 500 miles per day for eight days straight and not have to turn around and drive back. This was in early May. Spring was just beginning, snow was still on the mountains, and the rivers and lakes were still frozen in the Canadian Rockies and Alaska. Unbelievable beauty.

We settled into Fairbanks, which is within 200 miles of the Arctic Circle, and found that the distances between communities are quite extreme in Alaska. Not only that, there are not many (or any) roads linking the various villages. Flying is the way to go, but for fairly short distances, snow machines and dog sleds work well in the winter after the rivers have frozen over providing 'ice highways' everywhere. (I met a physician from Homer, which is located at the tip of the Kenai Peninsula, who takes his snow machine from just north of Anchorage and follows the Iditarod route to Nome and back each winter just for fun.) As Anchorage is 350 miles down the George Parks Highway from Fairbanks, most people just fly Alaska Airlines for the trip of about an hour. This flight takes one over the Alaska Range and just to the east of Denali (Mt. McKinley). If Denali was

'out', the pilot would occasionally take the 737 on a loop around the mountain to the delight of the passengers.

For a native Oklahoman, it was an incredible experience in a markedly different way of life due to both the climate and the geography. From summer days when there is no darkness and temperatures are up to around 90 to winter when the time from sunrise to sunset is only about 4 hours and temperatures can easily fall to minus 50. Our first winter there, we had a two-week stretch when the daytime HIGH never got above 40 below. (They called that a 'cold snap'...) Fairbanks is so far north that one can observe the moon above the northern horizon – looking over the North Pole at the moon on the other side of the earth. So, not only does the sun not set in the summer, there are times when the moon does not set as well.

Due to the remoteness of the villages off the highway system, people arrange to have food, medicine, and various supplies flown into their respective sites by the stores in Fairbanks. One retired couple I cared for lived west of the Denali National Park at an old lodge and had their supplies flown in weekly. On one such trip, the float plane flipped in the lake, killing the pilot. Unfortunately Alaska, with a population of only about 735,000, ranks high when it comes to lives lost in personal aircraft crashes.

The patients I met at the clinic included Native Alaskans, trappers, gold miners, 'haul road' truckers who take supplies to the North Slope, and the oil-field workers as well. Many lived in isolated dry cabins several miles from town, and those who lived in the villages were even further out. One Native Alaskan came in for evaluation of a swollen knee which had resulted from extensive snow-shoeing. It had to be a single-visit success as he lived in an off-road village on the Yukon River and had taken a snow machine for 2 hours to get to a car which he drove for another 2 hours to Fairbanks. Follow-up was not going to happen. A trapper, who had a one hundred mile trap-line along a tributary of the Yukon River far north of town, dealt with significant degenerative disc disease in his neck as well as poorly controlled hypertension (no surprise) and

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Dr. Eugene Hoyt



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would occasionally show up for his clinic visit when he had time. He was full of stories of adventure as well as advice on how to collect gold from the rivers without panning. (Secret stuff.) I also cared for some of the 'Gems of Fairbanks' – Old Timers (Sourdoughs) in their 80s and 90s who had seen many changes over the years and who settled there on homesteads long before Alaska attained statehood. One of these 'Gems' was a woman in her 80s (a local 'blue blood') who was born in Fairbanks. She related that her mother, who was born in Dyea, Alaska (the base camp for the Chilkoot Trail), would never tell anyone where she was born since Dyea only existed for about two years in the late 1890s, and they would then know her age.

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, with about 150 beds, is a quality facility but has limited specialty services. It is common for patients to be flown to either

Anchorage or Seattle for tertiary care. For that reason, we purchased an insurance to cover air ambulance costs, and that ran only about \$100 per year. One of my patients who suffered an intracranial hemorrhage and had to be flown out later related to me that the insurance she had only covered the air service from Fairbanks "to about the end of the runway". I have no idea how she ever is going to cover the thousands it cost her to get to Seattle.

Our time in Alaska's Interior passed seemingly in the blink of an eye, but the memories of our time in The Last Frontier will certainly last for the rest of our lives.

Note: For those of Stillwater and surrounding communities, you might remember that I practiced in Stillwater at the Mercury Marine clinic from 1998 through 2006.

Gary R. Kindell, MD

March 2015
Black Hawk Health Center Activities

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Cardio/core training	3 Exercise Room open 8-4:30 Anthony in Shawnee	4 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Lower Body Focus Training Class	5 Exercise Room open 8AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Upper Body Focus	6 Exercise Room open 7AM-4:30PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training
9 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Cardio/core training	10 Exercise Room open 8-4:30 Anthony in Shawnee	11 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Lower Body Focus Training Class	12 Exercise Room open 8AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Upper Body Focus	13 Exercise Room open 7AM-4:30PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training
16 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Cardio/core training	17 Exercise Room open 8-4:30 Anthony in Shawnee	18 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Lower Body Focus Training Class	19 Exercise Room open 8AM-12PM, 4:30-6PM Closed 12-4:30 for In service training 5 PM Upper Body Focus	20 Exercise Room open 7AM-4:30PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training
23 Exercise Room open 7AM-4:30PM	24 Exercise Room open 8-4:30 Elizabeth Cooking Class 11:00 AM	25 Exercise Room open 7AM-4:30PM	26 Exercise Room open 8AM-4:30PM	27 Exercise Room open 7AM-4:30PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training Elizabeth Cooking Class 12:00 PM
30 Exercise Room open 7AM-6PM 11:15 Circuit Training 12:15 Circuit Training 5 PM Cardio/core training	31 Exercise Room open 8-4:30 Anthony in Shawnee			