

Health fair attracts 1,500

By Jason Kotowski
Staff Reporter

Despite rainy weather, the Lantana Square Health and Fitness Fair attracted about 1,500 people June 21, said organizer Sandy Lenhard.

The event was held by Hockessin Urgent Medical Care to raise money for non-profit organizations. An estimate of money raised was not available.

Lenhard said the rain caused most people to congregate around the main tent and not walk around much, but she thinks everyone had fun. "Children have been stuck in the house with all this rain. I think they enjoyed getting out and having some free entertainment."

The fair featured a craft tent, balloons, face painting, clowns, magicians, food and a live radio broadcast by WJBR 99.5.

Health and fitness features included seatbelt, helmet and sport safety tips, asthma and allergy education, free screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, stroke and heart attack risk, complimentary fitness planning and self-defense classes, free computerized posture evaluation and spinal

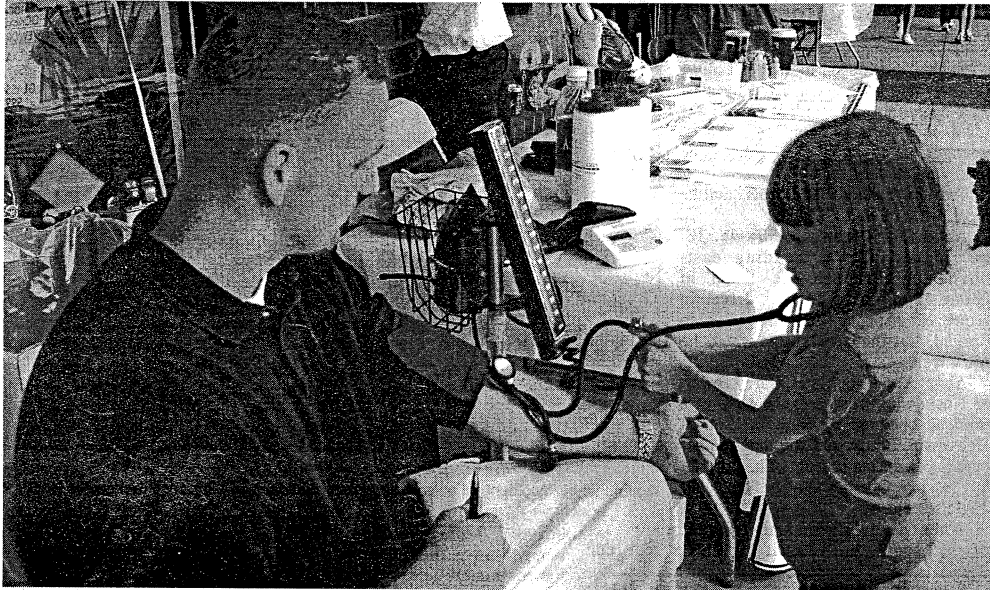


Photo by Ruxana Bhatti

Five-year-old Jaida Barnes checks her father's (Dan) blood pressure at the Cardiology Physicians Booth at the Lantana Square Health and Fitness Fair.

screen, information about cancer screening and prevention for skin, breast, colon and prostate cancers, acupuncture and and pet safety.

Lenhard said next year the event will be bigger and more spread out if the weather cooperates. "I'm going to talk to people and get some ideas on how to improve it," she said.

She said Hockessin Urgent Medical Care, A & W Entertainment, the volunteers, sponsors and non-profit organizations that participated in the event made it a "wonderful day."



Debby Wilson of Hockessin (center) looks at a Hockessin Fire Company engine with Brooke Taylor, 4, and her daughter Caroline Wilson, 5.



Dr. Vincent Schaller of Hockessin Urgent Care, which sponsored the fair, examines Alan Wang, 8, who came in with a stomachache.

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Urgent Care center opens in Lantana Square

By Andrea Miller
Staff Reporter

At Lantana Square Shopping Center, Hockessin residents grocery shop, exercise, rent videos and buy flowers. Now, they can also get immediate medical treatment for injury and sickness.

Hockessin Urgent Care, owned by Dr. Vincent E. Schaller, a family practice physician who has worked in Northern Delaware and Dover for more than five years, says his facility fills a patient care gap created by overcrowded emergency rooms, unavailable primary care doctors, and occupational health needs.

Occupational health, including spontaneous drug screening to meet OSHA requirements, pre-employment physicals, and treating on the job injuries, accounts for about a quarter of the business, he says. Another half of business comes from walk-ins: people who can't get in to see their primary care doctor, and don't want to wait to use the emergency room.

The center is open Monday through Saturday 12 p.m. to 8 p.m., and Sunday 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. All services are provided on a walk-in, without appointment basis. Schaller hopes to increase hours from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. by the end of the summer.

Most of the time, co-payment and insurance reimbursement at urgent care centers handled like any other medical service. Hockessin Urgent Care accepts all large insurance carriers, as well as smaller local commercial insurance, and self-insured company programs, all but two Delaware carriers. From a financial perspective, the patient will find using an urgent care center no more challenging than any other medical service, Schaller says.

He also says that getting referrals for urgent care is often easier than getting emergency room referrals, because insurance companies have an incentive. The cost is about a third of the cost for the exact same emergency room service, according to Schaller.

Urgent care centers were established in the mid- to late-1980's, when managed care was strong, according to Schaller. "With the rise of the HMO, there was a push for more efficient and cost effective ways of treating patients. Managed care would deny hospital stays, preferring to use urgent care and outpatient care."

Hospital inpatient volume dropped dramatically. For example, Christiana, originally a 1,400 bed hospital system dwindled to 700 beds by the 1990's, according to Schaller. "This was happening all over the U.S.," he said. "Hospitals shut down, they went bankrupt, they shrank. This is historically important because when we lost hospitals, we also lost emergency rooms."

Northern Delaware lost a hospital when Riverside was bought by Christiana care and converted to a rehabilitation center. Eventually, Christiana Care's inpatient services recovered to 1,300 beds. "But you can't add hospitals and emergency rooms like you can add beds. That is why the ER crisis has continued.

Today, there are five urgent care centers in New Castle County: on Silverside Road in Brandywine Hundred, one in Glasgow, Limestone Road in Pike Creek, Hockessin, and Middletown, and three emergency rooms, Christiana, Wilmington and Saint Francis. Riverside closed in the mid-1990's when Christiana took it over.

Teri Ford, Nurse Manager at Limestone Medical Center has worked in the urgent care center, one of Northern Delaware's oldest, since its opening almost 18 years ago.

Limestone's facility treats work-related injuries, sprains, suturing, sports and work physicals, and patients who are ill but can't get in to see their primary care doctor.

However, she says, her employer takes a conservative approach to potentially life threatening emergencies. She says the center is "not a substitute for a hospital emergency room, for treatment of severe accidents or life threatening problems." In other words, she says, "If someone calls with chest pain, we send them directly to the emergency room. We don't want to risk sending them to the wrong place and delaying care."

Schaller's approach is slightly different. He feels comfortable addressing issues such as chest pain, because his office, like other urgent care centers, can admit directly to area hospitals, which he says is often still quicker than an emergency room visit.

Dr. Joseph A. Lieberman, III, a member of the Delaware Health Care commission and former chairman of Family and Community Medicine at Christiana Care, says that urgent care centers provide a valuable service. "From my perspective, emergency rooms are being overly utilized by cases that can be better handled in a less intensive setting such as urgent care setting."

Lieberman, however, says that while urgent care centers fill a gap in health-care, are a reasonable alternative, and frequently the only one available, they are more of a bandaid approach than a final solution.

He says that the best patient care alternative would be 24-hour a day, 7-day a week coverage by patient's own primary care physicians, like pediatricians and family practice doctors, because neither emergency rooms or urgent care centers have a long term relationship with patients, and they



Photos by Andrea Miller

Medical and administrative staff of Hockessin Urgent Care (from the Left) Cindy Gunther, administrative, Katerina Aggelakis, accounting, Wiebke Scantick, head nurse, Nasia Schaller, practice manager, and Dr. Vincent Schaller.

don't provide continuity of care like a primary care physician does.

However, Lieberman suspects that is not likely to happen in the near future, if ever, because there aren't enough primary care physicians to meet the demand. "And there won't be, unless reimbursement and other factors change," which he says is unlikely because there are too many people with a vested interest in keeping system the way it is.

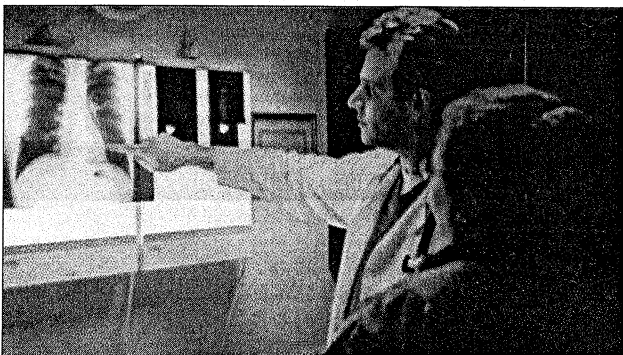
"There is no incentive in the current system to change it," he says, "First of all, there is a significant financial disincentive in being a primary care physician. Specialists can earn 10 or more times what a primary doctor earns, even though both are coming out of medical school with the same debt.

And, he says, there are status issues as

well. The prestige of being a primary care physician within the medical community is lower. In addition, medical student's first role models, medical school faculty, are overwhelmingly specialists.

Forecasting into the future, Lieberman predicts that there will be a continued and increasing gap in the supply for primary care and emergency room availability. The bottom line, he says, is that urgent care facilities have risen because there is a need to be filled, and they are a reasonable alternative to meet demand.

"Parents of young children have been the most appreciative, because AI duPont's volume is overwhelming. Our care of young children is increasing by the week, because word is getting out," Schaller.



Dr. Vincent Schaller and Head Nurse Wiebke Scantick look at an x-ray in Hockessin Urgent Care's new facility, which opened in April at Lantana Square Shopping Center.

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