



A Snapshot in Words

From the outside, Boyle McCauley Health Centre (BMHC) doesn't look like much; you might pass by it without a second look, except for the people. People who have set up camp on the cold cement deck, with their worldly possessions spilling out of shabby broken suitcases, backpacks that can't be zipped up, and shopping carts full to overflowing. It's a bit past 7:00 AM (official opening is 8) and there's already a lineup of people waiting to get in. It's heart breaking! I squeeze past people hunched up against the cold, muttering apologies because as much I want to I can't let them in right away. They're incredibly gracious, offering help with my load of bags as I rummage to find my keys.

Forty-five minutes later the doors open, within minutes the waiting area is almost full but not yet overflowing with people waiting for care, waiting to see a doctor, a nurse practitioner, a social worker.... The examination rooms are cramped. Not surprising for a community health centre that operates on a bare-bones budget and serves people who face challenges of poverty, homelessness, mental illness, addictions.

The surprise comes in watching Miranda (nurse) examine Dawn (not real name), a 25 year-old who's in for a run-of-the-mill prescription renewal. Only nothing is run-of-the-mill about Dawn or BMHC. It's an interaction that might take 10 minutes or less in a regular physician's office.

Miranda spends a good 30 minutes with Dawn (who lives at a nearby women shelter and is a sex trade worker), double-checking her health history, doing her vitals and asking careful questions to uncover any health and social issues Dawn may have failed to mention. Does she want housing, does she have warm clothes, how is she managing her diabetes and more?

It's a hive of activity ... a nurse is talking with one of the outreach workers who is getting ready to take a client for tests at a pulmonary clinic. Donna, another nurse, is caring for a patient whose arms and back are full of bed bug bites. She needs to get the patient into a shower, dispose of the clothes the person is wearing, find clean clothes, and speak with one of the social workers to organize temporary accommodation so that the client is not going back to bed bug infested apartment or a tent in the river valley. Like the patients above, everyone who comes to Boyle McCauley Health Centre has complex health care needs that require the care of a team.

Unique in Edmonton, health care at BMHC is truly integrated. Our doctors and nurse practitioners take a broad view of health care, and are experts in the type of care needed by the population we serve. Issues such as mental illness and addictions, HIV, and Hep C treatment are integrated in regular primary care. Along with the patient; nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, doctors, psychiatrists, mental health and addictions councilors, dentists, and outreach workers are all part of the team. We all work together to ensure that we understand our patients' circumstances, and that we can meet their needs.

In September, BMHC's various programs and services including the medical clinic, foot care, the dental clinic, Kindred House, HAART House, and outreach programs had over 12,000 patient contacts to provide and coordinate continuity of care.

BMHC is a not-for-profit charity, and Edmonton's only community owned and operated health centre. It fills a big gap in health care services for people who are living on the margins of society because of adverse historical, social, and economic circumstances. Comprehensive health care and support programs help mitigate the impact of the historical and the personal trauma that our clients have had to live through and are still dealing with.

Your help is vital in providing the full range of health care programs and services needed and necessary to make impactful changes in the lives of our clients. Since the opening of the Health Centre in 1979, many of the programs and services offered by BMHC have been made possible by the generosity of our friends in the community.

