

# ***OMC: MAKING STRIDES TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Natchitoches has the highest poverty rate among cities with a population over 10,000 in Louisiana. With a high poverty rate comes community health problems, risk of disease outbreaks, and unnecessary hospital and ER visits. The presence of a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in our community ensures the availability of affordable primary care services, helps keep people healthy, and lowers unnecessary visits to hospitals and emergency rooms. According to OMC’s CEO, Dr. Mark Guidry, “Natchitoches, Leesville, and Tallulah are all areas with high poverty rates and many people benefit from our affordable primary care services. OMC staff sees poverty-related health issues face-to-face, on a daily basis, working to keep them well and out of the hospital.”

An FQHC is a nonprofit organization that receives federal funding to serve medically underserved areas and populations. There are approximately 1403 FQHC organizations in the nation and 36 in the state of Louisiana, operating numerous facility locations. The Natchitoches Clinic was established in 1977 and was one of the first FQHCs in Louisiana.

OMC offers a Sliding Fee Discount Program. Low-income patients may request an application for discounted services. Upon completion, OMC staff will determine the patient’s percent of poverty and level of discount. Discounts may range from 20% to 100% of full charges. A patient who is below the federal poverty level-is never refused services due to an inability to pay. “Natchitoches is fortunate to have an FQHC, like OMC, that makes healthcare available and affordable for the underprivileged,” said OMC’s Board Treasurer, Patrick Jones, Sr.; however, OMC serves anyone – insured, uninsured, or under-insured.

As an FQHC, OMC offers several services in Natchitoches, Leesville, and Tallulah areas. Services include primary medical care, counseling, and psychiatry. Natchitoches has recently reopened its dental services after temporary closure during the onset of the COVID pandemic. “We are excited to have reopened dental. OMC will have an open house in the near future,” said John Winston, OMC Board Secretary. Dental services are highly beneficial to the Natchitoches area, because of the low number of people who have dental insurance coverage. Those without dental insurance may apply for a sliding fee discount.

In addition to re-opening dental, OMC is promoting public awareness of its pediatric services. All OMC clinics offer pediatric services through Family Nurse Practitioners. Services provided include well and sick child visits, developmental assessments, sports physicals and school-required vaccinations. Parents may contact their nearest OMC Clinic for an appointment; however, walk-ins are welcome.

OMC is also working to provide required and recommended vaccinations available at all of its clinics, including COVID Bivalent Boosters. According to CDC Guidelines, patients who are 65 or older or immunocompromised are eligible for an additional updated (bivalent Pfizer/Moderna) vaccine dose at least four months after their initial bivalent dose. Everyone ages six years and older should get an updated (bivalent) booster dose. In order to be up to date on a COVID-19 vaccine, patients must receive an updated bivalent dose as of fall 2022. Persons desiring optimized COVID protection may contact OMC to determine if a booster is needed.

On Wednesday, March 1, 2023, the Outpatient Medical Center Board of Directors adopted a two-year strategic health plan. The plan outlines OMC's priorities for the next two years, including increasing the Board's effectiveness, achieving financial health, maintaining healthcare compliance, recruiting and retaining the most qualified staff, and improving OMC's identity and credibility by improving and expanding its services. As part of its strategic health plan, the organization will educate the public on what an FQHC is and the services that it provides. Additionally, OMC is continuing its rebranding efforts started in 2020, and seeking to perform more outreach presentations in the community.

Since the onset of the COVID pandemic in early 2020, OMC has been moving forward on a long trail of improvements. The organization has worked on many operational improvements and has been successful in achieving compliance with several federal requirements. For example, in July 2022, OMC achieved Joint Commission in Ambulatory Health Care, Primary Care Medical Home, & Behavioral Health Care & Human Services. Shortly after, OMC underwent a Federal Risk & Safety Liability Audit and received a favorable outcome in February of 2023.

Lastly, in April 2023, OMC had a Federal Operational Review and did very well, meeting all requirements on May 25, 2023. “We are really proud of the hard work of staff correcting many problems of the past and bringing OMC into compliance with several audits that were delayed due to COVID,” said OMC Board of Directors President Thomas Roque Sr., “We believe these efforts will open the

door and provide health care to more people that fall through the cracks in Natchitoches.”

Almost three years ago OMC rebranded itself by creating a new logo and referring to itself as “The New OMC”. In addition to the name and logo change, OMC has made positive strides in decreasing patient wait times, being more responsive to phone calls, improving the physical environment of the clinics, scheduling prompt follow-up appointments, improving community partnerships, making referrals to area specialists, providing translation services, and increasing patient satisfaction.

The main challenge for OMC is recruiting and retaining the most qualified staff. Fortunately, OMC has come a long way. We have excellent providers in all of our clinics and we are working on acquiring staff to help support growing healthcare needs in our community. According to CEO|CMO, Dr. Guidry, “Our overall goal is excellence in healthcare and in patient satisfaction, with a special heart for the underserved.”

OMC is an option for you, because caring for you is what we do! For more information call the nearest OMC Clinic, or visit [www.outpatientmedical.org](http://www.outpatientmedical.org).

*(NOTE: For information about this news release, contact Colie Plaster, Public Information Coordinator at 318-357-2071 or [info@outpatientmedical.org](mailto:info@outpatientmedical.org))*

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