

Special way for uninsured

Two organizations help area patients who can't pay for specialists.

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When a mammogram discovered a lump in Marty McGinnis' breast last spring, doctors told her she needed surgery fast. Soon after, a worrisome lump appeared on her neck.

McGinnis was desperate. Without health insurance, she couldn't afford the operation.

But the Kansas City, Kan., woman, who is 61, found a surgeon to operate free of charge through a new program called Wy/Jo Care.

The program by the Medical Society of Johnson and Wyandotte Counties helps fill one of the greatest unmet needs of the area's uninsured: Finding medical specialists to take care of problems that can't be handled by safety-net clinics.

"I'm thankful to God I found this program," McGinnis said. "I don't know how I would have had this surgery. I would have had to go out and borrow the money."

Wy/Jo Care has been in place since August. A sister program on the Missouri side is just getting under way: MetroCARE, developed by the Metropolitan Medical Society of Greater Kansas City and Northland Health Care Access.

Wy/Jo Care and MetroCARE are based on a program pioneered a decade ago in Asheville, N.C.. Similar programs operate in Topeka and Wichita.

About 200,000 people in the Kansas City area are uninsured.

Although the uninsured are served by numerous safety-net clinics, such as the Kansas City Free Health Clinic in midtown and the Health Partnership Clinic in Overland Park, many places offer only primary care,

"We've already had surgeries done, an amputation, a hip replacement," she said.

Wy/Jo Care is limited to patients who have lived in Johnson or Wyandotte county for at least three months, have a household income less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$40,000 per year for a family of four) and do not qualify for Medicaid.

About 75 doctors have volunteered, along with Providence Medical Center and Overland Park Regional Medical Center. The program's goal is have all the local hospitals signed up and about 100 doctors.

"I'll take more, don't get me wrong," Amspacker said.