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New Astoria medical center offers cross-disciplinary care

As diverse borough faces dearth of medical facilities, doctors offer remedies in many tongues

By Rebecca Henely
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Consul General of Pakistan Faqir Syed Asif Hussain (second from r.) greets people at the ribbon-cutting for Dr. Irfan Iqbal's Astoria Medical, Dental & LASIK Center on 21st Street, which offers a variety of health care. Photo by Rebecca Henely

In response to three hospitals closing in Queens in the last three years, a new medical center in Astoria seeks not only to bring back more primary care but also enhanced eye care.

The doctors and other employees who make up the staff at the new Astoria Medical, Dental & LASIK Center, at 30-80 21st St., held a ribbon-cutting for the two-month-old center last Thursday. Joined by members of their families, representatives for elected officials and members of the Consulate General of Pakistan, the employees touted the center's variety of care and modern equipment.

"Our vision is primarily to have excellent patient care coupled with state-of-the-art technology," said Dr. Irfan Iqbal, president of the new center.

While Iqbal, a doctor and a Pakistani immigrant, is the head of the operation, he said the idea for the center was not his. Iqbal was approached by Hafeez Choudhry, the developer of the building, and Sam Klein, the landlord, about creating a center in January 2010, both of whom said there was not a comprehensive medical center from Hoyt Avenue to Queensbridge Houses in this part of Astoria. More than a year and \$2.5 million later, the center was completed.

"It's what I really refer to as a labor of love in every detail,"

Iqbal said.

Queens has lost three hospitals since 2008: St. John's Queens Hospital in Elmhurst, Mary Immaculate Hospital in Jamaica and Parkway Hospital in Forest Hills.

In accordance with its name, the center offers primary patient care and pediatric care with 16 examination rooms, a dental suite with four working spaces, a LASIK eye surgery room, four office suites, three reception areas and a nurses' station. The center has 25 full and part-time employees and plans to add more as it expands. Iqbal said at maximum the center can house 220 patients.

He said the center also hopes to include women's health care, family medicine and specialties like dermatology and cardiology.

The center is multilingual and offers care in English, Greek, Spanish, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Arabic.

Dr. Phillip Calenda, head of the LASIK department, said he has been doing LASIK surgery for more than 10 years and is excited about working with the two newest types of lasers in the field, the WaveLight Allegro Wave Eye-Q and Ziemer's Femto LDV.

"This is a great opportunity to select the top-of-the-line equipment," Calenda said.

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He also praised his fellow employees.

"We put together a great staff of people here who are excellent at what they do," Calenda said.

The center is on the first two floors of a mixed-use building that has residential units on the top five floors. One of the residents, Karen George, had good expectations for her new fellow tenant.

"Hopefully, it will be a good addition to the neighborhood," George said.

Faqir Syed Asif Hussain, consul general of Pakistan, said he was confident the center would provide good care and be a patient-friendly environment.

"The Pakistani community has greatly contributed to the development and progress of the United States," Hussain said.

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