

## Boston Medical chief eyes expansion

By Christine McConville

Thursday, May 1, 2008 - Updated 9h ago

 E-mail  Printable  (0) Comments  Text size  Share  (0) Rate

The state's health-care reform law has meant that the percentage of uninsured people coming to Boston Medical Center for free care has dropped dramatically, BMC Chief Executive Elaine Ullian said yesterday.

With nearly 362,000 Massachusetts residents now using the state's new health-care plan, only about 11 percent of the medical center's patients still have no health-care coverage, she said.

Back in 1996, more than one-fourth of the center's patients were uninsured, she said.

Ullian came to the Herald yesterday to talk about the 550-bed medical center she runs and the center's plans to expand in the next few years.

She also discussed the difficulty people have in finding primary-care physicians, and said that medical facilities should set a goal of guaranteeing patients an appointment within a week.

Throughout the country, the shortage of medical professionals means "people just can't get in to see doctors," she said.

Ullian has been with the Boston Medical Center since its formation in 1996.

Today, the center has 5,000 employees, 1,400 physicians and an annual operating budget of \$800 million.

It serves a large but mostly "invisible" population, Ullian said.

Fifty percent of the center's patients are "dirt poor," Ullian said, earning less than \$22,000 a year.

"They are the people who park cars and drive taxis," she said.

Seventy percent of the patients are nonwhite, and 40 percent don't speak English, she added.

"We serve a very hidden segment of society," she said.

The demand has required the center to continually expand, even as the surrounding area has undergone a transformation from a gritty city neighborhood to a posh one, with million-dollar penthouses and expensive clothing stores.

In the next few years, the medical center will have a greater presence.

This summer, the center plans to roll out its new master plan, which calls for, among other things, a new medical building and a new power plant, Ullian said.