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# A fledgling physician's practice aims to offer health care via subscription in Flint

By Tom Henderson

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Dr. Aisha Harris, the owner of Harris Family Health on North Saginaw Street in downtown Flint, has perhaps the smallest clinic in Genesee County.

Its one room is 13 feet by 13 feet, or 169 square feet. There is one reclining chair for patients to sit in and be leaned back and examined. She has no receptionist and no assistants. The sign on the door proclaims no walk-ins allowed, appointments only.

All of that, she says, is to keep overhead as low as possible and keep the cost of her subscription-based primary care as inexpensive as she can.

"It's a smaller clinic than people are used to," she said. "But the simplicity of it is very comforting."

Harris was a 2007 graduate of Carmen-Ainsworth High School in Flint, got a chemical engineering degree from the University of Michigan, then attended medical school at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

She graduated from Georgetown in 2017, then finished her residency at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2020.

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"I discovered I really liked family medicine," she said.

To her pleasant surprise, she then found a job back in her hometown, at Hamilton Community Health Network in Flint. "I didn't think I'd be able to get a job back home," she said.

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After two years there, "I realized I had an appetite for entrepreneurship," she says — which led to her leaving her job and starting her own practice.

She quit in September of 2022 and began meeting with members of the entrepreneurial support group in Flint to pursue her idea of a small practice with low overhead that could offer patients affordable care on a per-month subscription basis.

That month she entered a pitch competition at the 100K Ideas, an incubator then in the Ferris Wheel Building that recently moved next door into the Dryden Building.

She won the people's choice award, winning \$1,000 for getting the most votes by those in attendance. At the end of the year, she won a small-business grant of \$4,000 from 100K.

She also got some mentoring from Flint SOUP, a nonprofit offering a wide range of support to start-ups.

In January this year, Harris moved into her new office.

She currently has 25 patients signed up, with goals of hitting 100 by year's end and up to 300 in a few years.

"When I hit 150, I'll look for a bigger space," she said.

She offers basic care, making referrals for more complicated or expensive procedures.

She offers care to those ages 4-64, with a charge of \$45 a month for those 4-17 and \$85 for those older.

"I eventually hope to expand to 65 and up. I can't do Medicare, now, but hope to eventually."

Patients can reach her any time by text, email or phone call. "I love what I am doing. This is a practice like I wanted to have when I was in medical school. Owning my own business has been great, and I always wanted to be a community doctor.

"Medical debt is the biggest cause of bankruptcy in the U.S. Here, people can see that health care can be more affordable right now."

Afton Shavers describes himself as a happy customer of Dr. Harris. He said he met her two years ago while working on a committee of the NAACP.

He said when he heard she had started her new practice, he reached out to her. "I hadn't had a primary-care physician in years," he said. "It's working out really well. We all know we need to do a better job of taking care of ourselves and she's helping me do that.

"I love that she is very accessible. You can call her or text her and she is quick to respond."

Donquiel Lott was a patient of Dr. Harris when she was at Hamilton Community Health.

"I liked her care," he said. When he found out she was no longer there, "I found out where she was and got back with her at the beginning of the year. I was ready to switch to her from day one."

Lott said he has had a lot of nerve pain issues, particularly in his jaw. "I had been to a lot of primary care doctors. I spent nine months to a year trying to get help but no one could diagnose it or treat it.

"I talked with her. She made the diagnosis and got me on medication to manage the pain, and it's a lot better, now, manageable from day to day."

"Dr. Harris is amazing. She is a Flint native who is trying to alter the health care in Flint through the direct-care provider model," said Janis Mueller, the Kettering University-based regional director of the I-69 Trade Corridor Region for the Michigan Small Business Development Center.

Mueller was one of those in Flint advising Harris on getting her business started.

"Her knowledge, care and commitment to the patient are superior. ... I see her as instrumentally changing the access to medical care for individuals, but her membership model for small business allows a small business owner the ability to provide affordable access to health care for their staff.

"As businesses clamor for more workers, this provides a needed benefit for employers to give an affordable benefit to obtain and retain their workforce."

"What she is doing is phenomenal, revamping how health care is done," said Brandee Cooke-Brown, the executive director at 100K.

"There aren't a lot of Black doctors in the community. Her willingness to come back to Flint and do this speaks volumes."

**By Tom Henderson**  
Tom Henderson writes about businesses statewide for the monthly Crain's Michigan Business feature.

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