

## Removing stigma from detox: Clinic fills in service gap for primary care addiction treatment

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GateHouse News Service

Posted Oct 11, 2007 @ 11:28 AM

Last update Oct 11, 2007 @ 11:52 AM

WEYMOUTH, Mass. — A clinic with an unconventional approach to addiction treatment is now up and running in Weymouth.

The clinic, the latest of 21 clinics opened by Brookline-based Preventive Medicine Associates, actually opened in April. But, due to a lack of a nurse practitioner at the time, it was unable to offer its full array of services until the beginning of August.

Founded in 1993 by Dr. Punyamurtula Kishore, Preventive Medicine Associates provides primary care for individuals battling alcohol or drug addiction. Using the primary care approach, Kishore and his associates treat symptoms of withdrawal and provide education and counseling, allowing addicts to break the habit without being admitted to a hospital or treatment center.

"Once the addictive chemicals get into the body, the changes are more or less semi-permanent or permanent," said Kishore, 56, a Chestnut Hill resident who compared the approach to that of diabetes treatment. "People have to learn to live with the disease and make modifications in their lifestyles, modifications in the way they behave and think."

Kishore said his outpatient treatment strategy helps empower patients to manage addictive urges in the settings of their everyday lives. But to ensure they stay away from alcohol or drugs, Kishore has his patients come in for routine checkups throughout the treatment process to help guard against relapse.

That's where the new location comes in.

The Weymouth clinic, which employs five people and is located on Broad Street, is strategically placed to answer the demand of the practice's South Shore clientele, who previously were forced to travel to Brookline or Sandwich for service with one of Kishore's clinics, according to Weymouth office manager Sally Fuller.

"Schlepping to Brookline is sometimes just enough to keep people from going as often as they should," said Fuller, 51, of Weymouth.

So far, the new clinic is seeing 120 to 140 patients a month. Both Fuller and Kishore expect that number to rise. Kishore said his company sees 5,000 to 6,000 new patients a year statewide which, combined with continuing patients, account for about 36,000 patient visits per year.

From its inception in Brighton nearly 15 years ago, Preventive Medicine Associates now employs nearly 80 individuals, including 14 physicians, and has about \$8 million in revenues per year.

With the addition of its Weymouth branch, Kishore said the practice has saturated the Massachusetts market, but he expects to eventually expand to contiguous states, such as Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Hampshire.

Fuller said the practice's success is partially due to the stigma their patients may encounter elsewhere.

"We don't stereotype here," said Fuller of the primary care approach. "We do it in a setting where we make it feel like any other illness."

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