

Englewood health department clinic has new doctor

By **DANA SANCHEZ**

STAFF WRITER

ENGLEWOOD — The Charlotte County Health Department has hired Dr. Robert Hull to work at the Englewood clinic on San Casa Drive.

The clinic's previous doctor left the job last week after turning down a full-time position there, according to Steven Mitnick, director of the Charlotte County Health Department.

Marie Champagne, a longtime patient at the Englewood clinic, said that she was thrilled to hear the news. Champagne said she was devastated when she learned last week that the doctor had left the clinic. She worried that she and other Englewood patients would have to drive a distance to Port Charlotte to see another health department doctor.

Mitnick said he was equally thrilled.

Health departments in Southwest Florida and around the U.S. sometimes have a difficult time recruiting doctors because the salaries they can offer are not competitive with the private sector, he said. Charlotte County is no exception.

Mitnick said he had been advertising unsuccessfully for four months for a permanent doctor to work at the clinic.

Hull, 61, has been working at Charlotte County hospitals as a hospitalist for the last two years, and he brings a diverse medical background to the job, Mitnick said.

Hull learned about the opening for a doctor at the Englewood clinic after reading a story about it in the Sun.

"I was in the doctor's lounge at Charlotte Regional, saw the paper, saw the headline, read the story, and I was at the health department in 20 minutes," Hull said. "They hired me the same day."

Hull graduated as a doctor at age 51 from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine in St. Maarten.

"They don't accept many 50-year old medical students in the U.S.," he said.

He has five degrees, including one in podiatry.

As a hospitalist, Hull worked for other doctors, visiting their patients who were hospitalized and freeing up their days to see patients in private clinics.

Before that, Hull worked in Lee County for five years as a private practitioner doing internal medicine.

He has been a Charlotte County resident since 2003. His home and the homes of two family members were destroyed by Hurricane Charley in 2004.

The experience inspired an interest in disaster relief, and he drove a Winnebago full of medical supplies to the Gulf Coast to assist Hurricane Katrina victims.

The job with the health department is perfect for him, Hull said.

"The client population is needy, and that always strikes a chord with me," he said. "I'm at ground zero when it comes to disaster relief. Maybe it's the Albert Schweitzer in me."

As an employee in the health department, Hull said, he is expected to be a responder in a disaster.

"I'm tickled to be here," Hull said. "I feel very appreciated at the health department. In hospital work, that's not always true. There's a lot of people that don't want to be there. In addition, the patient population is very appreciative. They're not here for Vicodins and Valiums."

The Englewood clinic will be offering full primary care for adults, women and children with a nurse practitioner on site on certain days.

To schedule an appointment at the clinic, call 941-681-3750.

E-mail: dsanchez@sun-herald.com