

# Clinica Esperanza, Spreading Hope to Those Most in Need in the Community

Celebrating its first anniversary in June, Clinica Esperanza (Clinic of Hope) continues to do just what its name states – bring hope to a segment of the community’s underserved minority population.

The hands that bring this hope belong to students, residents and faculty members from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine (COM).

As a community-based primary care clinic, Clinica Esperanza offers free primary care every Saturday to underserved, uninsured Latino adults. The clinic is located in a racially integrated neighborhood in which 48 percent of the households have annual incomes less than \$20,000.

“Seeing our patients return for follow-up visits and experiencing charity in the truest sense of the word is an extraordinary thing,” said Jenny Tinch, an M4, and one of the 250 student and resident volunteers who have helped to organize this endeavor. Over 30 UTHSC faculty members also serve as volunteer attending physicians. There is no paid staff.



*Pat Adams-Graves, MD, center, and medical student Jeremy Draper, consult with a patient.*

According to Alicia McClary, EdD, professor of preventive medicine and a faculty advisor for Clinica Esperanza, student interest in the health of the Latino population began almost five years ago in a community-based program called “Mucho Gusto” (Pleased to Meet You) in which preventive

medicine students taught English to area Latinos. Class content was limited to phrases commonly used in patient/doctor conversations where poor communication is often a major barrier to effective



*Medical students Jill Tichy, left, and Peter Law, right, review patient records, while James Lewis, MD, center, talks with other students.*

healthcare. As teachers of these classes, the medical students discovered that in addition to not knowing how to talk to their doctors, their Latino students also had few places to go where they could find affordable healthcare. Many had come to the classes in hopes that they might also receive medical treatment from their student teachers.

Now Clinica Esperanza has made that hope for medical care a reality and is providing a gateway into the American health system for the underserved in the community. Open from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the clinic provides primary healthcare for 20 to 25 patients on average each Saturday. Over 400 patients have been seen in the past year.

“Clinica Esperanza represents all that is best in our medical students and faculty in demonstrating their commitment not only to patients but also to community service,” said Pat Wall, MD, interim dean for the College of Medicine in Memphis. “As noted in our Code of Professional Conduct, ‘patient welfare is our primary concern, for only by this commitment do we justify the trust placed in us by patients and the community at large.’ This clinic’s devotion to the underserved Hispanic community

is very special and no doubt will be realized even more in the years to come by all who have been involved.”

Efforts to open the clinic began in the fall of 2004. Despite rapidly developing enthusiastic support from students and residents, the success of the clinic depended on first finding a site that was affordable and accessible to an underserved population.

Fortunately, the outcome of this search marked the start of an exciting partnership with Christ Community Health Services (CCHS), a federally qualified primary care health center for the medically underserved. CCHS generously offered Clinica Esperanza the use of its clinic facilities every Saturday morning. In addition, CCHS physicians, administrators and staff are always available to share their knowledge and expertise concerning community need, patient care and clinic operation.

“Recruiting volunteers was the next step,” Molly Wimbicus, one of the M4 organizers, remembers. “It took many months of e-mailing and talking with students to get enough volunteers to operate the clinic. Luckily, the Class of 2006 was very eager to help.”

This willingness of students to serve has been key to the clinic’s success. “I have seen my classmates so concerned about a patient’s welfare that he or she will take time to contact a referral or follow-up on a lab while at work on a rotation during the week,” said Tinch, who was this year’s senior clinic coordinator. One example of this volunteer spirit is seen in M4 Kim Ingram, who while working the TICU (Trauma Intensive Care Unit) last summer, took a young boy’s information home with her so that she could contact a pediatric specialist during the week. “The TICU is a tough rotation,” Tinch explains. “Most students sleep on their days off, but Kim came to work on her free Saturdays and followed up with this patient during her regular work week. It’s inspiring to see that kind of dedication from so many people.”

There are many other examples of selfless service: for example, Kevin Giles, M4, a clinic regular who capably multi-tasks almost every job from clinic leader to lab technician; Jeremy Draper, M3, who teaches the twice-a-year Spanish Class for Clinica volunteers, recruits interpreters, and regularly volunteers for clinical

service; as well as Ben Bowman, Taylor Brownlee, Blake Bergeron, Anita Mehta, David and Jamie Navel, Erin Myers, Max Kelly, and Annie Glover, who are among the rising M4s preparing to lead the clinic in the coming year.

Although many student volunteers speak fluent Spanish, additional interpreters are always available to help deliver needed medical services, such as acute care, diagnostic and laboratory testing, preventive services and physical exams. Monthly specialty clinics recently have been added for eye care and women’s health.

Clinica Esperanza is not only changing the lives of the Latino patients it serves, but its medical providers have been forever influenced as well. If patients need referrals outside the realm of the clinic, students become patient advocates and help them navigate the complexities of the healthcare and social service systems.

“My experiences have shaped my future career plans,” Tinch said. “I want to make public

health and helping the underprivileged my life’s work.”

Without the assistance of UTHSC faculty members, the clinic would not be possible. Dr. McClary and James Lewis, MD, associate professor in the Department of Medicine and director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program, serve as the faculty advisors for the clinic, while the 30 additional faculty members provide invaluable support. The community is also involved with members having a chance to “pay back” the clinic by helping with pre-clinic setup, providing childcare in the waiting area and serving as Spanish “coaches” for the medical students.

“However, for all of the Clinica’s growth and success, the reality is that every week patients in need of healthcare are turned away. Our most immediate goals are to recruit more volunteer attending physicians; to obtain funding for enhanced medical education activities, clinical supplies and linguistically appropriate patient educational materials; and to assist patients in obtaining medications at a reasonable cost,” Dr. McClary concluded.

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*--Jenny Tinch, M4*