

# Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

## Free Clinics

Where do you go when you need a doctor and you don't have insurance? More and more hospitals are establishing free clinics to serve those who do not have a "medical home." Every effort is made to connect patients with follow up care and even help them obtain the medical supplies or prescription drugs that they need.

### **A community cares**

Just over a year ago, a dream became a reality when Watertown area businesses and healthcare providers, including UW Health Partners Watertown Regional Medical Center (WRMC), partnered to form the Watertown Area Cares Clinic (WACC). This clinic offers free access to medical care for uninsured and under-insured Watertown area community residents.

Carol Mertins, clinic coordinator, reports that after a year of operation, the clinic is a wonderful success. Mertins states, "WACC has helped many people. We have successfully followed our mission and look forward to many more years of helping people."

When community leaders learned that two other local free clinics were at capacity and were seeing many persons from the Watertown community, they explored the possibility of starting a Watertown clinic. WRMC provided a grant to fund the development of a business plan and provided medical professionals to serve on the board and planning committees. WRMC continues to support WACC by covering the rent for the clinic's space.

In its first 14 months, WACC has seen 565 patients in 1429 visits. Seventy-eight percent of patients are between the ages of 25 and 64. Sixty-five percent identified their race as "white", and 95% are residents of Jefferson or Dodge County.

Many of the clients see the clinic as a catalyst to help bridge the gap for people who are going through a rough patch in their lives. One beautiful success story from the WACC is Frank,\* a 45 year-old diabetic who was laid off from work. Frank was unable to afford the insulin he desperately needed. He came to the clinic despondent, jobless, and with his home was in foreclosure.

WACC was able to secure the drug he needed. Frank was able to get another job. Currently, he is back on insurance and he was able to save his house from foreclosure.

Over the past year, WACC has greatly expanded its base of donors and volunteers. Enthusiasm for the clinic has not diminished with the passage of time. The clinic has expanded its list of specialists (such as chiropractors, podiatrists, and chaplains) and is caring for the physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of its clients.

\*Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

**UW Health Partners Watertown Regional Medical Center, Watertown**

### **Aurora supports Open Door community clinic**

In every community there are uninsured and underinsured patients who need medical support. To help, there are free clinics and other fee-based clinics throughout the state. Aurora Health Care supports the "Community Clinic of Door County" with lab and diagnostic support. In 2008, Aurora provided more than \$7,000 in follow-up lab and diagnostic support, and as of mid-year 2009 has already exceeded \$7,000 in support. Aurora physicians donate their time to keep this clinic running and by serving on the clinic's board of directors. The clinic provides health care services on a sliding scale fee basis with patients paying only what they can.

**Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay**

### **Acting on his health**

Steve is a 19-year-old aspiring actor and has been an insulin dependent diabetic for five years. When he turned 19, he lost his health insurance, a dire situation for someone who absolutely relies on their medicine. His mother tried her best to help, paying \$600 per month for his health insurance, but at such a staggering cost, it wasn't something she could afford to keep doing. It was around this time that Steve was also struck with potentially life-threatening Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA) that

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## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

landed him in the Columbia St. Mary's (CSM) Ozaukee ICU for over a week. With such a frightening occurrence, it was obvious that Steve needed medical help that he could rely on. His lack of insurance was, in his eyes, a major hurdle.

Luckily, Steve had somewhere to turn: the Huiras Ozaukee Community Clinic, sponsored by CSM, saw him and was able to get him his much-needed insulin. Steve also received very helpful counseling from the clinic's diabetic nurse as well as a dietitian, both of whom helped him to learn to manage his diabetes through other ways than just using insulin. The clinic also helped Steve to apply for BadgerCare, which in turn provided him with his insulin. Additionally, the clinic was able to provide him with a Prodigy meter, glucose sticks and free syringes to best aid him in the treatment of his diabetes. The help of CSM and its Huiras Ozaukee Community Clinic has brought hope to Steve. Using the varied forms of help: hospital charity care, Huiras Ozaukee Community Care support and assistance in applying for BadgerCare, Steve was able to act on his health and begin to perform as a healthy adult.

**Columbia St. Mary's, Inc., Milwaukee**

### Partnering with The Salvation Army's Red Shield Free Clinic

Donna is a Sheboygan County woman who knew something was wrong, but didn't know where to turn for help. She had troubling symptoms such as red, itchy skin, and her hair was falling out. Although she wasn't dieting, Donna was losing weight and always felt tired and weak. She knew she needed medical attention, but faced a major obstacle. She was recently laid off from her job and couldn't afford to see a doctor. She was barely making ends meet on her unemployment compensation.

Donna is not alone in her predicament. There is a growing crisis in health care among the poor and working poor. Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center partners with community organizations, such as The Salvation Army, to help people like Donna get the medical help they desperately need — but cannot afford.

In operation since 1992, The Salvation Army's Red Shield Free Clinic serves the medical needs of low-income people who lack insurance. It's the only clinic of its kind in Sheboygan County and a valuable community resource. In these tough economic times, the demand for free medical care is growing rapidly. In the past five years visits to the clinic have increased 52 percent.

Pam Sandee, the Red Shield clinic coordinator, points out that in addition to seeing a doctor, many people seeking medical care at the clinic require lab work. She explains: "Our patients can receive a voucher to have their lab work done at Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center, free of charge. Aurora has been a great partner for us to work with."

In addition to the numerous vouchers for lab work fulfilled by Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center, the hospital provides funds on an annual basis to assist in funding prescription medications for the clinic's patients.

**Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center, Sheboygan**

### Hospital supports free holistic health clinic

When it opened in June 2008, the new free Shalom Holistic Health Clinic in Stoughton had a relatively slow start; however, appointments are now fully booked and staff are adding extra appointment times to accommodate the demand.

Because the services offered by Shalom are holistic in nature, the appointment process differs quite a bit from a conventional doctor's visit. Patient care is conducted using a multidisciplinary approach that addresses the "whole" person, including the physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of health.

Shalom Holistic Health Services is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide quality health care to low-income and uninsured residents within the Stoughton Area School District. Patients can be referred through another agency such as START (Stoughton Area Resource Team), Dane County Public Health Department, the Stoughton school system, or the Women's Wellness Program in Madison. Patients are also seen by self-referral.

Margo Dilocker, an RN at Stoughton Hospital, is another volunteer who loves her work with the clinic. "It's been a really good experience. I've never worked with anything like this before; it's a really different nursing role. There is much more of a team approach. It's a totally different way of approaching patient care, and I think it's truly an awesome system."

Stoughton Hospital also provides support to the free clinic through donations of equipment and offering discounted laboratory and medical imaging testing. Additionally, hospital staff members serve on Shalom's Board of Directors. The hospital's public relations department also donates their time and assistance in developing marketing and education materials related to the free clinic.

Dr. Jim McGrogan is one of the clinic's volunteer physicians. He is a board certified emergency medicine physician who works for Southern Wisconsin Emergency Associates, a company that staffs emergency rooms and urgent care facilities in Stoughton, Beloit and Oregon. Although he finds primary care to be much different from emergency care, he fully enjoys his work with Shalom. "It's good to know you're helping someone who really needs it," he says. "It's a really exciting opportunity."

**Stoughton Hospital, Stoughton**

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Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at [www.WiServePoint.org](http://www.WiServePoint.org).

## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

### **Aurora's support for Twin Counties Free Clinic**

The mission of Twin Counties Free Clinic is to provide free, basic, non-emergency medical diagnostic and treatment services for residents of Marinette County in Wisconsin and Menominee County in Michigan who lack sufficient resources to otherwise obtain these services. Volunteer health care professionals and other community members deliver care in a compassionate, confidential and professional manner with respect for human dignity. People with hypertension, diabetes, asthma and other basic medical needs—but no insurance—can turn to this clinic to receive expert medical evaluation and care, the medications they need, and support to qualify for a patient assistance program.

Funding for the clinic has come from Aurora Health Care, Bay Area Medical Center, Tri-City United Way, WPS Foundation, M&M Area Community Foundation and private donations. It receives no federal or state funding. With both funding and compassionate all-volunteer staff from Aurora Health Care and Bay Area Medical Center, a total of 548 clinic visits were completed during 2008. Since it opened in 2000 with the financial support of Aurora Health Care and Bay Area Medical Center, Twin Counties Free Clinic has had more than 5,500 patient visits.

Aurora Health Care donates space in its medical office building for the clinic to be open on Tuesday evenings. Area physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and other health care employees, including those from Aurora Health Care, donate their time at the clinic. The Twin Counties Free Clinic also receives a portion of the proceeds from the Aurora MACC Run/Walk held each year in July, which is sponsored in part by Aurora Health Care.

**Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay**

### **Diagnostic tests at Aurora Medical Center mean peace of mind for uninsured persons**

Bob, a 60-year-old Oshkosh resident without health insurance and employed part-time, was terrified he would lose his only source of income when his left leg grew noticeably larger than his right leg. He is a diabetic with a history of pulmonary embolisms and cannot find a job that provides health benefits. Bob's job requires him to drive and frequently get into and out of a vehicle. He was terrified and anxious that his leg problem would prevent him from working. Bob grew anxious and needed help fast.

John is a Winnebago County man in his 50s with a part-time job without health insurance who slipped on the ice and fell one cold winter night. From the pain that burst through his eyes, neck and head, he was sure parts of his face were broken and he had trouble seeing. John was worried about what happened to his face and eyes, but couldn't afford to go the emergency room.

Both men were able to get the care they desperately needed at the Living Healthy Community Clinic in Oshkosh. Both were referred to Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh for diagnostic testing. Both expressed concern about being able to afford expensive x-rays and ultrasound. Both were told not to worry because Aurora Medical Center provides free diagnostic testing and lab work to patients of the clinic.

In addition to free diagnostic testing, Aurora also provides housekeeping, medical waste removal and outside maintenance at no charge to the clinic. Last year, the Aurora Health Center and the Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh donated more than \$100,000 in cash to help patients at the clinic.

In operation since 2001, The Living Healthy clinic serves the medical needs of low-income people who lack insurance. It's the only clinic of its kind in Winnebago County and a valuable community resource. In these tough economic times, the demand for free medical care is growing rapidly. The number of visits has almost tripled since the clinic opened. In 2007 the clinic served over 4,000 patients.

**Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh**

**Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at [mgrasmick@wha.org](mailto:mgrasmick@wha.org).**



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