Mrs. P

Patient Profile.

A couple of years before turning 65, Mrs. P and her husband retired from steady jobs with benefits. Life was good and the empty nest was wonderfully quiet. With heart disease running in her family, however, Mrs. P knew that being under a doctor’s care was critical. So, the plan was to pick up private health coverage until they were Medi-care eligible. And it seemed to them like a fine plan. That is, until Mrs. P’s preexisting arthritis, reflux, and hypertension prevented her from becoming insured. Not knowing where to turn, a friend at church told (cont. page 2)

Do You Know a Psychiatrist? Then Read On.

We’ve had some dedicated psychiatrists come and go. Our lone volunteer psychiatrist for the past 5 years, Dr. Tom Lynch eagerly awaits my words, “we found another one for you!” Since Dr. Lynch started volunteering over 12 years ago, general patient visits have ballooned 66% to 5000. In the past three years, behavioral health visits increased 488% to 700 + visits in 2010, or 14% of all patient visits. Consequently, he added Tuesday afternoon appointments to his regular Thursday morning time. We realize there’s a shortage of psychiatrists out there, so they’re busy. Why would a psychiatrist want to practice here? Because we’re different. Consider the unique benefits of volunteering at Shepherd’s Clinic:


- Unshackle your hands from behind your back. Practice psychiatry the way you’d imagined back in medical school. Since all our patients are uninsured, you don’t need to maneuver with insurance and can focus on delivering patient-centered care.

- Get almost instant satisfaction. Take it from Dr. Lynch, “There’s traction from the beginning with the patients. The work is very gratifying in the sense that people still have more or less intact families and most of them are working – all without health insurance. And because of ancillary services including the Joy Wellness Center, patients are more motivated and less demoralized. The medical support is excellent.”

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The Pulse is the newsletter for donors, staff, & those interested in learning more about Shepherd’s Clinic and Joy Wellness Center. Please contact us at 410.467.7146 or director@shepherdsclinic.org.
In late 1989, a year and a half before we opened, I wrote a monthly departmental newsletter:

Located in the heart of Baltimores City, the Seventh Baptist Church ministers in an area of tremendous social need. Increasingly, one of those needs is medical care for the working poor...those persons employed without medical benefits at wages insufficient to purchase medical insurance. Since many of these uninsured local residents receive medical care from outpatient clinics, the hospital facilities and staff are overburdened. As preventive care would pay off not only in improved health, but also in financial savings to society, a steering committee has been formed to establish a health clinic specifically for this population. We have always come up with the name "Shepherds Clinic." Utilizing volunteers, the faculty would offer a variety of health care services, from simple medical care for minor and chronic problems to health education in lifestyles to prevent illness.

More than two decades later, we prepare to celebrate the 20th anniversary of our June 1991 opening, I wrote these words as part of a recent grant application:

Through the use of volunteer physicians, nurses, and interested others, Shepherds Clinic provides quality health care for Baltimore residents who cannot afford commercial insurance, yet do not qualify for government assistance.

With the overall goal of arranging affordable, comprehensive care, we help bring our patients health issues under control while teaching new strategies for self-care. By providing annual screenings and health care for common health problems, and routine visits to control chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, Shepherds Clinic takes on the critical role of primary care provider preventing illness from becoming a medical emergency. And because our patients experience sufficient stress and fear of adversely affecting their health, we extend our services beyond primary and specialty care to mental health and wellness programming.

So, here we are, 20 years old and our mission remains unchanged yet still fresh...like we're 20 years young. One of the few integrative medicine centers dedicated to the economically disadvantaged in the nation, we are the only facility in the Baltimore metropolitan area that limits its service to the uninsured and has access to a full spectrum of care through the longtime generosity of our partner Union Memorial Hospital. Story after compelling story, we've been making us feel ashamed. I am bankrupting our household or making us feel ashamed. I am so grateful. The email drives home the point that, whatever reasons a person is uninsured, the need for access to affordable, comprehensive health care in a welcoming environment is vital. That's what we've always provided. That's Shepherd's Clinic.

From Mrs. P's first visit, she knew this was no ordinary urban clinic. She remarks, "In the waiting room, the patients were saying the same thing...that this place is a godsend." She noticed how friendly everyone was, and they would talk in the artwork on the walls and the comfortable furniture. She says, "I used to work in the health care field and the atmosphere was always so sterile. But here it's not. This place doesn't feel medical and it started ministering to me immediately. When you have an appointment, you leave your own home and family and come to another home and family.

The volunteer doctor that saw her, Dr. J, began to take a personal interest in her. Then, again, Dr. J does that with all her patients. Mrs. P said they talked about her meds, they talked about her weight, they talked about everything, including the needs of her husband and kids. In fact, they even talked about one of Mrs. P's friends who had recently experienced rapid weight loss and whose personality had been changing. At the urging of Dr. J, her friend was quickly screened over the phone, qualified as a Shepherds Clinic patient, and during the hour-long intake physical a few days later was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Thankfuly, through Shepherds Clinic's long-time partnership with Union Memorial Hospital, surgery was scheduled immediately and her friend is now doing well.

I wouldn't trade this place for all the money in the world," Mrs. P is often heard to say as she travels the halls of the clinic. "Dr. J has all my chronic health issues under control and I get my meds through the clinic's Prescription Assistance Program. And now, the Joy Wellness Center folks have been so helpful to me to learn to take some time for me. I'm doing nutrition classes, yoga, walking, mediation, and every so often I sign up for massage therapy. I'm eating better, I'm losing weight, and I feel so much healthier. It even helps me communicate better in my marriage.

Mrs. P turns 65 next month and Medicare will replace Shepherds Clinic's care. She says, "I am anxious because I have to leave this place where I feel so protected, educated, and embraced. But I leave knowing that I am well. And now I'm telling my neighbors, my church...even people in the supermarket about this clinic. I tell the people in my care, here was far beyond what I could ever pay for. And I say to them, 'Go there and be healed.'

Jack LindenHengel Executive Director

From the Director's Desk.

Volunteering at the Joy Wellness Center – furthering the clinic’s partnership with MICA and its community-based mural class

Wellness Center Administrative Volunteers: We Need You.

What fills your days outside of the clinic? I’m a full time student at Johns Hopkins University. I participate in several health-related student groups. I’m also helping to develop a mentoring program that will connect college students with the Youth Dreamers program next door.

What was your first impression of the clinic? It seemed like a very tight-knit community and everyone was really friendly. I was shocked when I saw the Joy Wellness Center for the first time – it’s a beautiful space!

How has this impression changed, if any? I didn’t really realize that most of the people working the front desk or assisting patients are also volunteers. There are few staffers. The clinic really depends on volunteers and that’s part of what makes it a great place.

What’s a typical morning for you here? This morning was busy! I helped set up for a nutrition-cooking class – how to cook healthier food. In the midst of this, I helped another sign up for massage therapy and gave another patient a tour of the wellness center. She was so excited that she spontaneously decided to attend the cooking class. I helped the instructor prepare the ingredients and assisted with the class. We learned how to cook healthy “fried” chicken (made with corn flakes for that crispy texture!), sweet yams, and macaroni and cheese.

What do you like about your job here? So many things! First, I like the people. Volunteers and staff are caring and dedicated. They make the clinic feel more like a community center than a place for sick people. Second, no one has a superiority complex. Patients, volunteers, staff, and health professionals treat each other amiably and with respect. No one disregards your suggestions or opinions because you don’t have a title by your name. Lastly, I never feel like I am doing useless work.

How do you feel on your way to the clinic, and after you leave the clinic? I’m often pretty exhausted on my drive to the clinic since I have a 70 mile round trip and the atmosphere is always so welcoming. I'm often pretty exhausted on my drive to the clinic since I have a 70 mile round trip and the atmosphere is always so welcoming. I feel excited on my way here because I wanted to help others. I’ve been volunteering here for 12 years because I found it so enjoyable and educational. I set a goal for myself to volunteer whenever possible to give back to the community.

What would you recommend to someone who might want to volunteer here? Just come, be part of the team, and do things you enjoy doing.

Kristen Klepac, wellness center admin volunteer, helps nutritionist volunteer, Kathy Landers as volunteer RN, Sharon Carletti, looks on.

MICA students, Tori Bagget, Lee Nouvel, and Scott Sheridan completed a beautiful 4’x16’ wellness-themed mural in a hallway leading to the Joy Wellness Center – furthering the clinic’s partnership with MICA and its community-based mural class.

Karin Duckett, MD, DC, FCFP, also serves as Executive Director of the Joy Wellness Center.

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