



DELIVERING CARE TO THE STREETS

Despite advances in medicine, an increasing number of Americans' needs for basic healthcare go unmet, and in many communities homeless persons can only turn to hospital emergency departments to receive healthcare services. Because this norm is unacceptable, St. Francis Hospital's management team has collaborated with other community organizations to respond to the very real needs of the homeless and indigent in Wilmington, DE. St. Francis Hospital has developed two innovative programs: St. Clare Medical Outreach and Tiny Steps.

ST. CLARE MEDICAL OUTREACH

St. Francis's first step toward medical outreach began with demographic surveys, which shed light on the tragic reality of those in need: Wilmington has 20,361 people living at or below the poverty level; among these are an estimated 2,000 homeless and an additional 3,100 persons "at risk." Because the Ministry of Caring, a Catholic organization sponsored by the Franciscan Friars, had vast experience working with the Wilmington poor through soup kitchens, shelters, job placement services, and day care for homeless children, we at St. Francis Hospital asked the organization to join us in a collaborative ministry.

Our two organizations agreed that we had to meet the immediate needs of the poor while

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BY PAUL C. KING, JR.

working with them on a long-term basis to improve their quality of life and eventually help them achieve self-sufficiency. Recognizing that the poor and indigent find transportation, clinic schedules, and intimidating paperwork to be major barriers to healthcare, we sought a creative approach that would bring healthcare to them in a nonthreatening way, while also offering continuity of care. Providing day care to homeless children so their mothers can work, teaching home-

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Recognizing that the poor and indigent find transportation, clinic schedules, and intimidating paperwork to be major barriers to healthcare, St. Francis Hospital and its partner in this collaborative ministry, Ministry of Caring, sought a creative approach that would bring healthcare to Wilmington's needy in a nonthreatening way, while also offering continuity of care. St. Clare Medical Outreach van staff began administering much-needed healthcare services on April 27, 1992.

For years, St. Francis Hospital has supported a pediatric clinic at West End Neighborhood House, an organization offering a variety of family-related services to the indigent. In September 1992 the hospital collaborated with other community organizations to offer a more comprehensive, holistic healthcare service to those in need. This joint-venture of St. Francis Hospital and 11 other community organizations is designed to lower the infant mortality rate by identifying high-risk pregnancies early on and managing complications during pregnancy and after birth.



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less persons skills that will help them secure jobs, and helping drug abusers receive rehabilitation are some of the ways St. Francis and Ministry of Caring help the poor achieve self-sufficiency.

On April 27, 1992, the St. Clare Medical Outreach van pulled up in front of area soup kitchens and homeless shelters for the first time, and staff began to administer much-needed healthcare services. Not only was it the fulfillment of a lifelong dream for St. Francis Hospital Medical Director Thomas C. Scott, DO, but the van was a victory over skepticism for Scott, the hospital, and Br. Ronald Giannone, OFM, director of the 15-year-old Ministry of Caring.

Given many logical reasons by healthcare consultants, administrators, foundations, and even ministers in the field as to why a medical outreach van would not succeed, we fought battles over how to obtain multiple city parking permits for the van, "no-cost" prescription medications, and the trust and confidence of the homeless, who had heard too many "false promises" from the medical establishment. Our dedication is now paying off: More than 12,000 homeless persons have been treated, and the positive response to this innovative ministry continues to increase. Today, the St. Clare medical team visits Ministry of Caring kitchens and shelters on a daily, scheduled basis. The rate of return for follow-up care is more than 80 percent.

The Wilmington community, moved by the innovation and faith of this collaborative ministry, responded with great generosity to St. Clare Medical Outreach. More than 90 percent of the initial two-year costs were donated by foundations, churches, synagogues, and individual donors, yielding more than 3,500 gifts totaling more than \$900,000. St. Francis Hospital is committed to raising or providing annual ongoing operating costs of approximately \$250,000.

A TRUE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The van's staff—Scott, a full-time nurse, a professional driver, and a bilingual social worker—are united in mission and nurtured by daily prayer—a true Christian community. They care for not only their patients' physical health, but their emotional, mental, and spiritual health as well. Staff members have invested themselves personally in those they serve, as evidenced by Scott's frequent invitations to the homeless to join him for meals and fellowship.

"This outreach has been successful beyond my wildest expectations and dreams," says Scott.

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The staff of St. Clare Medical Outreach care for not only their patients' physical health, but their emotional, mental, and spiritual health as well. (From front to back: Thomas Scott, DO; Maryann Fagan, RN; medical social worker Luz Santana; and driver Jim Skully.)

"Not only are we meeting acute health needs, but we are able to practice a holistic, family medicine. We have seen people reunited with families, attend alcohol rehab, and receive basic necessities. We are building more than a means to healthcare in our mobile van; we are building a mutual trust that keeps our patients coming back."

More than 40 medical school students have completed a rotation on the van. My son was the first medical school student on the van. His work with Scott has taught him to practice medicine in a Christ-like manner. The students' work with St. Clare van clients heightens their awareness and, I hope, results in a more value-driven approach to medical care.

TINY STEPS

Because the value of human life is one of the basic tenets of our Franciscan vision, the statistics on infant mortality in our community were shocking and demanded serious attention. Although the



United States has a rate of 9.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, Delaware's rate is 11.3, and Wilmington's 20.9.

For years, St. Francis Hospital has supported a pediatric clinic at West End Neighborhood House, an organization offering a variety of family-related services to the indigent. In September 1992 we collaborated with other community organizations to offer a more comprehensive, holistic healthcare service to those in need: the Tiny Steps pilot program. This joint-venture of St. Francis Hospital and 11 other community organizations is designed to lower the infant mortality rate by identifying high-risk pregnancies early on and managing complications during pregnancy and after birth.

Tiny Steps applies an interdisciplinary approach to providing medical and psychosocial intervention to pregnant, low-income women, the babies' fathers, and supporters (e.g., friends and family), with the help of St. Francis Hospital physicians, nurse-midwives from a local birthing center, a nutritionist, social worker, and volunteers. It also provides on-site access to the Women, Infants and Children's program; Medicaid; and programs at West End Neighborhood House. Like the St. Clare Medical Outreach Van, Tiny Steps is rooted in a desire to identify the needs of those we serve and to increase healthcare access to those who would usually fall through the cracks.

Tiny Steps is innovative because family practitioners act as role models for the family practice residents by working with nurse-midwives and encouraging the residents to help out in the community after completing their training. In addition, it is the only community center-based prenatal program for the underserved in Delaware. Family practitioners coordinate both prenatal, labor, delivery, and follow-up care. And all the services are available in one place—the West End Neighborhood House.

The prenatal care program takes the whole person into consideration, offering birthing classes, social service help, case management, nutrition classes, transportation, drug counseling, and pharmaceutical assistance. After delivery, it includes well child care and immunizations, as well as referral for ongoing medical care to prevent perinatal mortality or morbidity.

St. Francis Hospital physicians and family practice residents currently spend 14 hours a week serving Tiny Steps patients. In addition to physicians' salaries, other costs include obstetric con-

sultation and assistance salaries; labor, delivery, and recovery charges; hospital supplies; emergency room visits, and miscarriage costs. Last year's total expenses came to \$575,000.

MEETING ITS GOALS

During the first year, the Tiny Steps program met its goal of serving 125 women. A key ingredient in the program's success is the real feeling of family between care givers and staff. Each patient becomes a friend. When her baby is born, everyone associated with the program celebrates that new life.


Because preventive care and self-confidence can greatly affect how these infants are raised, Tiny Steps recently added a mentor for mothers and fathers. Staff members guide men and women through the first year of parenthood to develop parenting skills, self-sufficiency, and independence. Under the supervision of the program's coordinator (a registered dietitian), a social worker, an administrative assistant, two parent mentors, and a laboratory technician have dedicated themselves to Tiny Steps.

We expect Tiny Steps to decrease the infant mortality rate through intervention for those expectant mothers in Delaware's New Castle County. Because of the overwhelmingly positive response and desire for services, we are currently requesting funding to serve 40 percent more clients (i.e., 175) next year.

RESTORING WHOLENESS

Tiny Steps and the St. Clare Mobile Medical Outreach are in stride in their commitment to providing creative ways to ensure the indigent in this community have better access to healthcare. Through these outreach programs, many forces have come together, united by a faith-inspired vision of social justice and by a desire to serve those who are often overlooked by society. St. Francis Hospital, a member of Franciscan Health System, Aston, PA, serves some 250,000 patients annually in the greater Wilmington community, with more than 1,600 employees operating out of not only the hospital, but 10 satellites as well. Yet no matter how diverse and large our capabilities grow, it is vital to remember our roots, to allow the essence of our vision to penetrate every decision and every action. □

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 For more information on St. Francis Hospital outreach programs, call Paul C. King, Jr., 302-575-8301.