

## **MEDICAL STUDENT-RUN HEALTH CLINICS: A GROWING TREND IN COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND MEDICAL EDUCATION**

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**BACKGROUND:** Medical student-run health clinics are popular programs for medical students to serve their community while gaining clinical experience. However, there is no information on how many such clinics exist nationwide, how many patients these clinics see, what services they offer, or how many students are involved with these programs.

**METHODS:** We disseminated an online survey through email and telephone invitations to the Deans or Directors for student affairs at 124 Association of American Medical Colleges allopathic medical schools in the 50 United States.

**RESULTS:** A total of 94 schools (76%) responded, of those who responded 52% (49/94) have at least one student-run clinic and 24 schools have more than one. The following results are based on 59 different student-run clinics for which we collected data:

- Student-run clinics operate in a variety of settings, most frequently homeless shelters/community agencies (32%), hospitals (19%), and churches (14%). Almost all (98%) operate year-round, and most (81%) see patients at least once a week.
- The average clinic has 16 student volunteers a week, including preclinical-year medical students (93%), clinical-year medical students (77%), and, less frequently, health-related graduate students (37%) and undergraduates (35%). All clinics have at least one faculty physician present while operating, but many also have a professional nurse (26%) or social worker (21%).
- Respondent clinics report an average of 19 patient encounters per week, of which 15 are visits with a medical student and faculty physician – about 36,000 annual patient visits across all clinics. About half (48%) of visits are returning patients. Clinics serve predominantly minority populations: 31% Hispanic; 31% Black/African American; 25% White; and 11% Asian. Most clinics (88%) serve uninsured patients, although many (36%) suggested that they do not ask patients' insurance status.
- Student-run health clinics provide a variety of services including blood pressure monitoring (98%), acute care (97%), blood glucose readings (86%), standardized patient education (66%), condom distribution (64%), health form completion (64%), and multivitamin distribution (55%). Preclinical medical students routinely perform many of these services. Most clinics (79%) dispense some or all medications on site, including antibiotics (86%), hypertension drugs (84%), non-prescription analgesics (84%), and neurological drugs (45%). If further care is needed, patients are most frequently referred to the emergency room (85% of clinics). Most clinics (81%) have arrangements for laboratory services on- or off-site.
- Most clinics (78%) never charge patients. Clinics are most often funded by private grants (71%); other income sources include student fundraising (62%) and government grants (25%). Some respondents noted that medical schools and pharmaceutical companies donated medications or supplies. Twenty-seven clinics reported their annual operating budgets, which averaged \$18,784.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Medical student-run health clinics are significant both as educational programs and also as a health service for disadvantaged patients, to whom they offer a variety of medical services, medications, and referrals. Student-run clinics are now established healthcare delivery programs involving thousands of medical students, tens of thousands of patients, and hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. Wider considerations of community health and medical education should not neglect the local role of medical student-run health clinics.