

FREE CLINIC OF THE
NEW RIVER VALLEY:
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS
OF SERVICE TO THE
COMMUNITY.



THE FREE CLINIC FORUM

WINTER 2006

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ROBINSON HIRED AS NURSE PRACTITIONER

Helen Robinson has joined the Free Clinic as its first full-time staff Nurse Practitioner thanks to a grant from the Virginia Health Care Foundation.

In this position, Robinson will see patients during newly established daytime clinics on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, in addition to the present Friday day clinic and Tuesday night clinic. She will provide medical care to our patients with chronic conditions and oversee needed referrals for specialty care and

testing. She will work under the supervision of our Medical Director, Dr. Daniel Kelly.

Although a new member to the staff, Robinson has volunteered at the Free Clinic for the past ten years. Prior to this appointment, Robinson worked for the Montgomery County Health Department, where she will continue to assist one day a week. Robinson received her B.A. from Cornell University in 1974 and she became a licensed Nurse Practitioner in 1999.



Helen Robinson, N.P.

REPAIRING THE SAFETY NET

From the Executive Director - Amy Forsyth-Stephens, MSW

Imagine a family high above the street, precariously balancing themselves on a tightrope. They look at the net below them. Instead of one, there are three separate nets, side by side, and with definite gaps between. The family centers themselves over one of the nets, so if the worst happens, at least they won't fall through the cracks.

Such is the current free clinic arrangement in the New River Valley. We are fortunate to have three official Free Clinics in our region: The Free Clinic of the New River Valley, the Free Clinic of Pulaski County and the Mental Health Association's Pro Bono Counseling Program (the Mental Health Free Clinic). Each is a distinct, private, non-profit organization, serving a target population it has defined using factors of geography, income level and illness. Together, they employ 24 full-time staff, are governed by 50 board members on three separate Boards of Directors,

operate out of 12 different facilities, coordinate hundreds of volunteers, and serve the health, mental health, dental and pharmacy needs of thousands of our low income neighbors each year. It's a remarkable safety net, but it has a multitude of holes.

Hole #1: none of the clinics share patient information, so patients could be receiving duplicative service, or services that are not medically compatible.
Hole #2: eligibility criteria differ among the clinics, so a person at a certain income level in one community may be eligible, but a person at that same income level in another community may not.
Hole #3: patients at one clinic may have access to certain medicines or specialty care that are not available to patients at other clinics. The list goes on and on.

Now for the good news. Leaders of all three clinics agree that it's time to mend the holes in the safety net. We have joined

together in a year-long process of planning to improve our ability to function as one system of care. Our goal is to become seamless—in the methods by which patients receive treatment, and by which we coordinate and measure the impact of these services.

We are already making progress. The Virginia Health Care Foundation (VHCF) has provided funding for our "Inter-operability Project" - the first project of this kind to receive VHCF support. Board members are meeting, staff are feeling inter-connected, and goals are being established. We are motivated by the image of that family on the tightrope. If the worst does happen, we can best help by joining together.



BOARD PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: BECOMING MORE THAN A BAND-AID

BY: ZACH SLAGEL

Thousands of local residents use the Free Clinic as their “medical home” each year. That is, they have no family doctor, no specialist to see when they are sick, injured, or in pain. They could use the local ER, but most choose to come to the Free Clinic, where they know they will not have to worry about exorbitant medical debt or paying for prescriptions.

In the past, getting medical care at the Free Clinic was a cumbersome process. The Christiansburg Free Clinic door was open only once per week, on Tuesday evenings for a “General Walk-In Clinic.” People would start arriving at 3:30 in the afternoon, for they had heard that we would sometimes limit the

number of patients who could be seen. A person needed to be one of the first in line to be assured a slot. Even then, depending on the needs of the patients in the waiting room, the wait could be until 11:00 p.m. or later to be seen by a physician and receive any medications.

This was unacceptable. More and more of our patients—people with chronic, debilitating health conditions and medical charts four inches thick—were vying for a spot in line to be treated by whichever volunteer medical professional was working that night. The volunteer physicians were getting frustrated. They felt that they could not adequately address the complicated health needs of patients who they were seeing for the first time and likely would not see again. Patients were not getting the education they needed to monitor their own conditions and move toward better overall health.

I am happy to report that we have made significant progress in

becoming more than a once-a-week option for a quick fix. We now have a Nurse Practitioner, Helen Robinson. All patients with

chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, arthritis and pulmonary and heart disease, are transferred to her caseload. They are given appointments in daytime specialty clinics where they receive ongoing treatment and education to enable them to be partners in their health care.

The Tuesday night clinic still operates, but our volunteer physicians are able to serve all who come and the wait is much shorter. The Walk-In Clinic serves primarily people with acute health needs—the sprained ankles and ear infections. Most of our regular patients are now served during the day with appointments and a consistent provider. We are on track to become a true piece of the health care solution for the New River Valley.



Zach Slagel, Board President

FREE CLINIC OF THE NEW RIVER VALLEY STAFF:

Amy Forsyth-Stephens, MSW
Executive Director
Michelle Brauns, MS, *Director,*
Community Resources
Beth Ashe, *Director, Administration*
Carol Bebko, *Office Assistant*
Cindy Bolling, *Office Assistant*
Debra Cook, CPhT, *Medication*
Assistance Caseworker
Jessica Hellman, *Dental Assistant*
Duane Lenart, RPh, *Pharmacist*
Joy Martin, CMA
Linda Ridley, CPhT, *Pharmacy*
Coordinator
Helen Robinson, NP
Sara Robinson, *Office Assistant*
Robert Trout, DDS
Rochelle Wheeler, MA

Contributing writers: April Campen and Lisa Hoag



FREE CLINIC BOARD MEMBERS

Executive Committee

Zach Slagel, President
Jim Rakes, Vice President
John “Jay” Edwards, PhD
Secretary

Mark Bryant, CPA, Treasurer
George Smith, Jr., MD,
Past President

Board Members

Karma Castleberry, PhD
Jim Cowan, Jr.
Mary Ann Hanna
Daniel Kelly, MD
Sally McCarthy

Jackie Nutter
Ward Stevens, III
Jimmy Whitaker
Glenn Young, DDS

We welcome our newest board members:
Charles R. “Pete” Beller, III,
LeClair Ryan Flippin Densmore

Cathy Callahan, MD, Virginia
College of Osteopathic Medicine

Scott Hill, CEO, Montgomery
Regional Hospital



DENTAL CARE: PROVIDING NEEDED SERVICES FOR OUR PATIENTS THANKS TO OUR DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

2006 brought a new face to the dental team at the Free Clinic. Joining staff dentist Dr. Robert Trout chair side is Jessica Hellman, the clinic's new dental assistant. Jessica has worked in a variety of clinic roles for over a year and completed the dental radiation and safety training at Wytheville Community College in September.

Jessica also provides support for our volunteer dentists. Every month, many local dentists give several hours of their time to see patients either during the day or in the evening.

This year, Bill Armour, DDS (Shawsville), Richard Boyle, DDS (Blacksburg/

Radford), Graham Hoskins, DDS (Radford), Mona Semtner, DDS (Blacksburg) and Barry Wolfe, DDS (Christiansburg) provided periodontic care, oral surgery and dental services.

These dental professionals often come to the Free Clinic following a day at their own practice and provide services to patients that might require more complex dental procedures. They are dedicated to the dental care of our patients and the mission of the Free Clinic. We thank them for their ongoing commitment in meeting the dental needs of our community.

CALLING ALL DENTAL VOLUNTEERS!

If you provide dental care or know of someone who would be interested in serving Free Clinic patients, we need you!

We have many volunteer opportunities for dental providers at the Free Clinic to see patients during the day or in the evening. Another option is for a provider to see patients in his/her own office. Contact us at 540-381-0820 for more information about dental volunteer opportunities.

QUICK FACTS about the state of dental care according to the 2000 Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health:



Insurance coverage for dental care is increasing but still falls behind medical insurance



For every adult 18 years or older who lacks medical insurance, there are three without dental insurance



Robert Trout, DDS, is the Free Clinic staff dentist. He treats acute pain patients who have a need for simple fillings or extractions.

LONG-TERM VOLUNTEER NURSE CONTINUES GIVING BACK

Sally Linares, RN, has been a dedicated nurse virtually her entire life. At seventeen, Sally received her nursing degree through the Saint Thomas Hospital in London, England. For the past six years, we've been fortunate to have her as a faithful volunteer spending eight hours each week working in our medical program. And now with the expansion of services to medical patients, Sally has added a second day to her volunteer schedule.

Sally's main role at the Free Clinic has been to coordinate specialty referrals for patients with hospitals and physician specialists who are part of our health care network. Although she doesn't

practice her nursing skills with patients, she says it's important for her to stay active in the medical field and feel like she's giving back to her community.



Sally Linares, RN

Adding to her busy schedule, Sally also volunteers her time at The Smithfield Plantation in Blacksburg working in the gift shop and with the various Christmas activities held there each year.

Thank you Sally—you've absolutely gone above and beyond!

OUR VOLUNTEERS

"Watching a cluster of colorful helium balloons rise up through the sky brings a smile to every face below.

While the cheerful appearance and bright colors attract attention, it's 'what's inside' that makes the balloons rise.

Defying gravity. Surpassing obstacles. Just like you. Your attitude, outlook and dedication inspire us onward and upward."



You've lifted us to new heights.

MEET OUR NEWEST VOLUNTEER: CAROL REID, RN

Since she was seven, Carol Reid knew exactly what she wanted to do when she got older. She was determined to become a nurse simply because she enjoyed helping people so much. She realized that dream upon receiving her degree from Wagner College in New York and spent the next 45 years serving patients.

When Carol retired from her most recent position at a Christiansburg physician's office, she began looking for a way to keep doing what she enjoys and maintain her nursing skills. She found herself at the Free Clinic in September and since then has been an active volunteer each week. Besides volunteering, Carol is also an active member of Luther Memorial Church in Blacksburg and is also an avid VT Hokie fan.



Carol has shared her skills healing many patients over the years and we are thrilled to have someone of her caliber become involved and help alleviate our patient load.

NEWS FROM THE RADFORD SATELLITE- A VOLUNTEER WHO FEELS THE JOY OF COOKING

When Valerie Cox began cooking as a call to ministry at her church several years ago, she never knew how far it would grow. But grow it did. She cooks for her church, the Radford Free Clinic satellite and local organizations.

Why does she cook meals? States Cox, "I cook because I like to cook, because I am good at it, and I like practical ministries that fill real needs."

An employee of Carilion New River Valley Medical Center, Cox began volunteering as an eligibility screener for the Radford Satellite when the clinic opened two years ago. She began cooking and now coordinates meals for the two walk-in medical clinics held each month.

"On clinic nights I am either working in the Fellowship Hall with the group who has volunteered to cook, or I cook dinner at my home and bring it to the Clinic to feed the doctors, nurses and volunteer staff. As the coordinator, I contact the leader of the Ministry group scheduled to cook, help them choose a menu and then contact church members to request supplies. All of this is done on a rotating schedule," relates Cox.

"I would like to encourage everyone to take stock of their lives and realize how richly blessed they are. Then, with grateful hearts, be willing to share some of those blessings with those around them."



BRIDGING THE PRESCRIPTION GAP



The Free Clinic's monthly budget for ordering medicines is \$5,000 but to ease that burden, Debra Cook, the Free Clinic's medication assistance caseworker, coordinates with pharmaceutical companies to receive free medicine for patients whose income is low enough to qualify.

Nearly all Free Clinic patients are eligible for this assistance, but many people don't know that help is out there. Through her work, 465 clinic patients receive medication they wouldn't be able to access otherwise.

For example, a patient taking Nexium pays \$455 at a retail pharmacy for a 90-day supply. When a patient receives Nexium – or any medicine—at the Free Clinic, it only costs them an

administrative fee of \$4.00.

Patients taking Nexium might not know it, but they are saving about \$1,800 each year because the Free Clinic can go directly to pharmaceutical companies on their behalf to purchase drugs to keep in stock.

Patients will be asked to bring in documentation such as tax forms, and Cook files their information with pharmaceutical companies to determine qualification. Each company requires different paperwork and it can be somewhat complex weaving through the websites. Even if patients could get the medicine delivered directly to their home, they might not be able to determine how to complete the process online. Cook has taken a course to learn the software required to

communicate with pharmaceutical companies and other clinics.

In October, 17 eligible patients were registered in various medication assistance programs and 173 new drug requests were submitted. In the last two weeks of October, Cook obtained over \$15,000 in medicines.

Cook is constantly balancing her workload. At any given time, she may be adding new patients to her file, working on pending medication orders, or handling shipments. She also provides assistance to the Pharmacy Coordinator as a pharmacy tech during regularly-scheduled clinics.



Debra Cook, CphT

MANY THANKS TO LOCAL SUPPORTERS

THE BLACKSBURG NOON ROTARY - Rotary members presented the Free Clinic with a donation of \$2,000 at their September meeting. The funds are greatly needed for the purchase of three pieces of equipment: a hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) machine used to

measure the glycemic control in diabetic patients; a pulse oximeter which is a photoelectric device used to test oxygen saturation; and a peak flow meter used to measure air flowing out of the lungs in patients with asthma.



Beth Ashe, Free Clinic Director of Administration, receives the Rotary donation from Rotary President, Dave Widder.

LOCAL ARTIST'S BENEVOLENCE ENHANCES FREE CLINIC LOBBY

Virginia Tech psychology professor, author and artist, **Joseph Germana**, has loaned five pieces of his art to the Free Clinic.

A founder of the VT psychology department, Germana has taught there for over 40 years and for the past 30 has celebrated art through paintings and constructions.

Besides the Free Clinic, his work also hangs in the offices of the Mental Health Association of the NRV, buildings around the VT campus and are sold at **Miller off Main Street Galleries** in Blacksburg.



New River Dermatology— Dr. Daniel Hurd

Over the summer, Dr. Daniel Hurd donated several Psoralite © "light boxes." This equipment provides a type of phototherapy used to treat skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema.

Joe Germana's colorful and uplifting works of art hang in the Free Clinic lobby.



PATIENT FOCUS: EUGENE ROBINSON—A STRONG MAN WITH “ALOHA SPIRIT”

For the past year and a half, 45-year old Eugene Robinson has been slowly recovering from a devastating stroke that kept him in a Roanoke hospital for three months.

Upon discharge, Robinson found himself in a desperate situation. Even though he had medical insurance, he was still left with huge bills that caused him to deplete his savings. And incredibly, he came home to more bad news: a letter stating that his retirement had disappeared due to a “cook the books” scandal at a long-distance phone company which had squandered investor funds.

Robinson felt sick in more ways than one.

He left his Hawaiian home in 2002 to become the lead banquet cook at the Hotel Roanoke and to be closer to family on the East Coast. At the time of his

stroke, he was the dietary manager at the bake shop for Richfield Retirement Community. Because he had to relearn basic skills, he could not return to his job.

An incredibly happy man, Robinson chuckles as he relays his story. “I’m still smiling,” he laughs. He ties that behavior to the laid-back lifestyle he became accustomed to in Hawaii and the feeling of “Aloha Spirit”



Full of “Aloha Spirit,” Robinson has maintained his positive attitude despite many tribulations.

that islanders live by. “Everyone greets you when you walk by – everyone smiles,” he recalls.

“I still have family in Hawaii. My son helps me as much as he can, but I hate asking,” states Robinson.

After another unbelievably bad turn of events—a fire that devastated his apartment—he relocated to Christiansburg to find a less expensive place to live.

Although he currently receives some disability assistance, he’s slowly getting back into the work force through part-time/short-term jobs. He found himself at the Free Clinic in September when his blood pressure began causing him problems.

“I’ve always tried to treat it with lifestyle change, not medicine, but it got out-of-hand,” relays Robinson.

By working closely with the nurse practitioner, Helen Robinson, he’s found a regimen of drugs that have been successful.

“I couldn’t be more proud to talk about this place. They treat me like I’m a person – like family,” states Robinson of the Free Clinic staff.

It’s been a slow and difficult process laden with unfortunate incidents, but Robinson has a future goal. “I’m trying to get back to where I can think straight and get back in the kitchen. Unfortunately, I kept all my knowledge in my head and I didn’t write [recipes] down, but I know I can get there.”

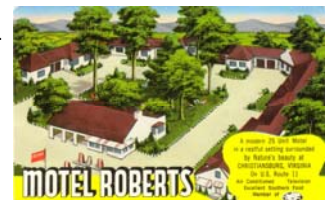
We know he can get there too and we’re pulling for him with “Aloha Spirit” to match his own!

Did you know? Almost 45% of our patient population is diabetic. As a result, several diabetic medicines are prescribed at the Free Clinic.

One drug—Avandia—is very popular. Over a 3-month period the clinic will prescribe 70 prescriptions for a savings of \$8,747 due to pharmaceutical company assistance.

DID YOU KNOW? A LITTLE BIT OF OUR HISTORY.

The Motel Roberts, built in 1941 by Lawrence L. Roberts, is now home to several businesses including the Free Clinic. The motel was conveniently located for travelers on old Route 11 in Christiansburg and was a very popular layover for tourists. As the authentic postcard pictured here states, it was a modern 25 unit motel in a restful setting surrounded by nature’s beauty. Sounds like a wonderful location for a Free Clinic!



We are on the web!
www.nrvfreeclinic.org



215 Roanoke Street
Christiansburg, VA 24073

Phone: 540-381-0820

**WORKING TO BUILD
A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY**

**BECOME ENGAGED IN OUR
COMMUNITY'S HEALTH.
SUPPORT THE FREE CLINIC TODAY!**

Personal gifts from individuals, churches, businesses, civic organizations and foundations are vital to the Free Clinic of the New River Valley. Please help us in our mission to provide free medical services, prescription medications and dental care for our residents in greatest need.

Enclosed is my gift of: _____

(Please make checks payable to the Free Clinic of the New River Valley)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone/e-mail address: _____

I would like this gift to be:

In memory of: _____

In honor of: _____

Please notify those listed below of this donation:

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Please contact me about volunteer opportunities: ____

Please complete and return to: Free Clinic of the New River Valley, 215 Roanoke Street Christiansburg, VA 24073
Phone: 540-381-0820.

The Free Clinic is a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization. All deductions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



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