

Case Study: Community Volunteers in Medicine

Location: West Chester, Pennsylvania

Budget: \$1,200,000

Patient Visits in 2011: 20,000

Abstract

Community Volunteers in Medicine (CVIM) offers comprehensive primary care and health prevention programs to uninsured residents of Chester County, Philadelphia. As a VIM clinic, retired medical professionals are a core component of the volunteer workforce and have contributed significantly to enhancing the clinic's medical and organizational expertise. Access to a network of retired medical activists has led to the development of successful recruitment and retention methods. By partnering with local universities, the clinic runs a robust oral health program, which provides routine and emergency services to children and adults.

Community Overview

Community Volunteers in Medicine (CVIM) is located twenty miles west of Philadelphia, in the borough of West Chester, which is home to predominately high income earners holding professional-level positions. From 2005-2009, the mean family income was \$80,357 in any given year; however 9.8% of family incomes fell below the federal poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. During the same time span, almost 26% of individual incomes fell below the poverty level.¹ This stark contrast not only provides a snapshot of palpable income inequality, but illustrates significant potential for financial support from the community. Although access to a high-income earning donor base exists, recent state budget cuts have amplified the fragmentation of health services particularly in areas such as mental health. These cuts have intensified pressure for CVIM to absorb patients that require services beyond the clinic's traditional scope of care.

Utilizing the expertise of retired medical professionals and university students

Established in 1998, CVIM provided services through 20,000 patient visits in 2011. Based on the Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) model, CVIM has access to a dedicated network of volunteer health professionals, technical resources, and tools to implement and improve operational efficiency—giving the clinic flexibility to meet the shifting need of the community. Community Volunteers in Medicine provides primary and dental care to residents of Chester County whose gross income is at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey

CVIM manages over 250 volunteers including practicing and retired nurses, physicians, specialists, dentists, and pharmacists. Located near several top-tier universities and high-performing hospitals, fourth-year medical, dental, and pharmacy students have been a tremendous asset over the years. Over 100 students completed clinical requirements at the clinic in 2010. With only 11 full-time and 6.5 part-time staff, CVIM relies on the quality and commitment of its volunteer staff to deliver continuous, quality care.

Harnessing the expertise of retired medical professionals is a hallmark of the VIM model. Established in 1994 by retired medical professionals in Hilton Head, South Carolina, the VIM network has grown to 85 clinics across the country in 25 states.² As part of the network, VIM clinics share knowledge through real-time communication. Using an email group, clinics can pose questions, send feedback, and find solutions to clinical and managerial issues.

CVIM encourages volunteers to take ownership of short-and long-term projects. Located close to a number of universities including—Temple University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, University of the Sciences, West Chester University, and Villanova University—CVIM provides advanced-standing students with hands-on clinical experience and educational opportunities.

CVIM's volunteer committee focuses on recruitment, recognition, and retention

In 2010, CVIM completed a strategic plan, which highlighted the need for a volunteer committee to focus on: recruitment, recognition, and retention. The committee's first task was to develop an online volunteer orientation process. The new process includes:

- Comprehensive overview of CVIM
- Information on what to expect as a volunteer
- Volunteer training information

Streamlining this process led to more efficient volunteer recruitment efforts and orientations. Information is captured in one central location, which is accessible to new volunteers at any time.

Each year the committee organizes a volunteer recognition event, which honors volunteers who have completed five and ten years of services with CVIM. Last year, awards were given to 24 volunteers in appreciation of their service. Other efforts around recruitment and retention include:

- Attendance at over 60 community-based events

² Volunteers in Medicine Website: <http://www.volunteersinmedicine.org/alliances.shtml>

- Formation of a volunteer committee of the board of trustees and development of volunteer recruitment goals
- Presentations to medical professionals at hospitals luncheons
- Transition of the volunteer application process to an online format

Scaling up to meet patient needs: increasing capacity for oral health services

CVIM runs a robust dental program on a budget of \$550,000. The clinic employs a full-time bilingual dentist, an EFDA (Expanded Function Dental Assistant), and one dental assistant. This core group of staff ensures quality, care coordination. The recent acquisition of an additional 2,000 square feet has increased the capacity to perform dental services in light of increasing patient demand. The clinic provided 5,700 dental visits in 2011, up from 4,861 in 2010.

Staff and volunteers provide routine and emergency care. The clinic currently has 6 dental operatories, over 30 volunteer dentists, 9 volunteer hygienists, 2 volunteer orthodontists, 15 volunteer dental assistants in addition to support staff. The clinic offers a full range of dental services including cleanings, fillings, x-rays, extractions, and fluoride treatments.

Providing oral health care to children through community collaborations

The clinic also provides oral health services to children. Each week between 15 and 25 children receive treatment, prophylaxis, orthodontia, and oral health education.³ In partnership with three neighboring school districts, CVIM provides dental care to children who are referred by their school nurse. These children, who are transported to the clinic by a faith-based center, also receive smoking prevention and oral health education. In Addition, CVIM partners with the Head Start program, including the Migrant Head Start Program, which provides oral health screenings and fluoride treatments to all children in the program (approximately 400). CVIM currently has 25 children in braces, although many children have received braces in the past.

In addition to Temple University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry and other universities, CVIM partners with two dental hygiene schools: Harcum College and Montgomery Community College. The use of students has greatly enhanced the treatment capacity of the oral health program. In 2010, 60 dental students assisted with cleanings, treatments, and procedures. That same year 40 hygiene students completed trainings at CVIM. Dental hygiene students offer smoking cessation sessions to patients based on their screening and patients are also able to access HIV testing services.

The dental team recently assessed the oral health outcomes of 50 adult patients who were receiving hygiene appointments and education. The study concluded that over 50 percent of returning patients saw improved oral health.⁴

³ Community Volunteers in Medicine Newsletter. Fall 2011.

⁴ Ibid.

Lessons Learned

✓ **Take some time to think creatively about return on investment.**

A number of student volunteers rotate through the clinic each year, therefore CVIM began to think creatively about capturing knowledge. Students are asked to develop patient education PowerPoint presentations, which are displayed on a flat screen monitor in the patient waiting area.

✓ **Volunteers *can* spearhead long-term projects.**

Volunteer leaders have become an integral part of the CVIM model. CVIM empowers volunteers to take ownership specific projects including: tracking credentialing and TORT insurance. A Volunteer Committee was also formed to identify volunteer recruitment goals and strategies.

✓ **Making a financial investment in volunteer training does pay off.**

Cultural and language barriers can be a significant barrier to receiving culturally component care. Many of CVIM's patients are native Spanish speakers; therefore the recruitment of bilingual volunteers is a high priority. Finding it difficult to recruit bilingual translators with medical backgrounds, CVIM began to cover the costs for a few selected interpreters to attend a seminar for medical Spanish. By increasing the number of volunteer interpreters, CVIM is better positioned to provide quality care to all of their patients.