

University Students Give Free Medical Care at Community Clinic

BY EMMA WILLIAMS
STAFF WRITER

Some people think they only need to go to doctors when they are sick. Others are forced to skip routine checkups because of health care's rising costs.

Twenty-six years ago, UNC medical students started trying to encourage people to seek preventive care by organizing a free health clinic called the Student Health Action Committee. Now the oldest student-run free clinic in the country, SHAC is open from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Wednes-

day at the Orange-Chatham Comprehensive Health Services building on Roberson Street in Carrboro.

"We do the best we can, and we don't turn anyone away," said Cindy Green, a second-year medical student who is one of the clinic's coordinators.

Although they would appreciate larger facilities and more equipment, patients are what the clinic needs most.

"I don't think enough people know about it," said Rob McLaughlin, a senior health policy administration major who organizes the clinic's marketing. "Some people at the

School of Public Health don't even know about us."

Doug Sigmon, a second-year medical student and head of the medical school's Family Medicine Interest Group, said the clinic planned to start a public relations campaign this year.

McLaughlin said the campaign would help reach people who needed the clinic. "That's what we're trying to do, to really reassess how (the SHAC clinic) is known throughout the community," he said. "I'm sure there are sick people out there who need our help."

Last year, 100 area residents visited the clinic. According to a survey given by the clinic, about half of the clinic's patients had health insurance, but only 10 percent said they could afford to pay for health care. One-third of the adult patients had full-time jobs, and 83 percent earned less than \$20,000 per year.

Immunizations, physicals, dental checkups and health counseling are the clinic's main services. Students from the schools of medicine, nursing, public health and dentistry staff the clinic.

About 85 percent of the clinic's patients come for routine physicals.

Many of the people who came to the clinic for physicals Wednesday said they

"I came to medical school to help people, and sitting in a classroom, you just don't feel like you're doing that."

CINDY GREEN

Second-year UNC medical student and SHAC clinic coordinator

came primarily for financial reasons.

Keith Torrey said she brought her son to the clinic because her doctor would have charged \$80 to examine him. Physicals are not covered by Torrey's insurance plan.

Allison Mahaley brought her 4-month-old son to the SHAC clinic for a well-baby checkup, which measures whether babies are growing at a normal rate. Mahaley said she chose the clinic because the services were free, but that she returned because the services were high-quality.

"It was great," Mahaley said. "The doctors were really helpful, and they seemed grateful to have you here, which was a change."

"It's the same thing as going to UNC (Hospitals). You see a student and then you see a real doctor," she added.

First and second-year medical students are responsible for interviewing the patients to learn their medical history. Fourth-year medical students examine and diagnose the patients. Before the patient leaves the clinic, a supervising doctor reviews the medical students' work.

The experience benefits the caregivers as well as the patients.

Green said working at the clinic helped her keep her goals in perspective.

"Medical school can be a brutal experience, especially for the first two years, because what you've always wanted to do is not what you're doing," Green said. "I came to medical school to help people, and sitting in a classroom, you just don't feel like you're doing that."

Daryl Martin, a senior health policy administration major, said working at the clinic had given him a new perspective on other types of people in the community. "It's shown me ... people who are being neglected the way the health-care system is arranged now."

Ed Jones, a first-year medical student who volunteered for the first time Wednesday, said he learned the importance of communication skills for doctors.

During an internship, Jones had questioned patients about their medical histo-

ries, but he never had asked patients questions about drug and alcohol use or sexual behavior before.

"Those questions are uncomfortable, and I prepared myself before," Jones said. Then he had to decide whether it was appropriate to ask an adolescent boy's father to leave the room while asking uncomfortable questions.

Interviewing a patient who did not speak English fluently also was a new experience for Jones.

"That's an interesting question I'll have to consider: what's a transcultural way to make people feel comfortable?" Jones said.

Some people might be nervous about going to a "doctor" who had not graduated yet. To allay these fears, clinic coordinators point out that fourth-year medical students already have completed two semesters of hospital work during which they perform the same services they would at the SHAC clinic.

"It's not like I'm here to learn off people," said Belal Saib, a dental student who works at the clinic regularly. "The work we do here is a lot simpler than the work we do at school. It's really more of a service."

Green said working at the clinic was rewarding. "I feel like I've given back something I've always wanted to give."

Autopsy Fails to Uncover Cause of Phoenix's Death

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
LOS ANGELES — River Phoenix lay dying on the sidewalk while his brother pleaded with a fire department dispatcher to send help for the actor, who collapsed outside a nightclub.

"You must get here, please, you must get here, please," his brother said. "I'm thinking he had Valium or something."

First, the 23-year-old actor was writing on the sidewalk. Then he lay motionless, as if sleeping. Within an hour, Phoenix was pronounced dead early Sunday at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

An autopsy Monday was inconclusive, coroner's spokesman Scott Carrier said. Results of blood and chemical tests will take weeks, he said.

But paramedics were told the actor had been taking drugs, county fire Capt. Ray Ribar said. "It was the classic cocaine over-reaction — it just nails some people and stops the heart," he said.

Phoenix, who received an Academy Award nomination for the 1988 movie "Running on Empty," collapsed after partying with his brother, Joaquin "Leaf" Phoenix, 19, and actress Samantha Mathis at the Viper Room in West Hollywood. The club is owned by actor Johnny Depp.

"After eight minutes of seizures, arms flopping, his knuckles hitting the sidewalk, his head banging back and forth, his feet flopping up and down, after about eight minutes of that, he finally became still, completely still," said witness Ron Davis.

Several yards away on a pay telephone, Phoenix's brother was frantically trying to get help.

"Where is the guy? (paramedic) ... Please, 'cuz he's dying, please!" the actor's brother told the dispatcher.

"Where's your brother right now?" the dispatcher asked.

"He's laying on the cement," Leaf Phoenix said.

"Is he breathing?" the dispatcher asked. "I don't know. The last I checked they said he was breathing," he said, yelling to a companion. "Is he ... breathing? (back to dispatcher) I don't know if he's breathing. Please, you got to get over here! Where's the ambulance?" Moments later, a calm

Leaf Phoenix told the dispatcher: "He's not having the seizures anymore. He's just passed out. ... He just looks like he's sleeping."

Phoenix had been in the midst of filming the movie "Dark Blood" with Judy Davis and Jonathan Pryce. Work on the Fine Line Features film was suspended Monday, and it probably won't be completed, the producers said.

Phoenix had been cast opposite Tom Cruise in the film version of novelist Anne Rice's "Interview With a Vampire."

Filming had been scheduled to begin Nov. 25.

Phil Alden Robinson, who directed Phoenix in last year's "Sneakers," said he was talented and willing to take risks in his acting.

"There are two rivers flowing through him," Robinson said. "One is the adventurous young man, and the other is a very old-fashioned, gentlemanly, kind soul."

Phoenix, who was named after the river of life in Herman Hesse's "Siddhartha," was known as the model of good health, clean living and professional dedication. He was a vegetarian and animal-rights activist who campaigned against wearing animal furs.

The actor's family, gathering in Los Angeles, said in a statement, "His beauty, gentleness, compassion, vulnerability and love is a gift for all eternity."

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

THE ANSWERS ARE 'YES!'

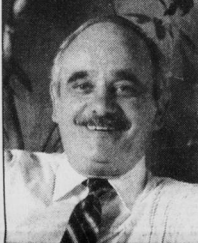
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