Clinic needs a major shot of the right medicine

Dr. Anne De Groot makes sure the medical students who come to work at the free clinic know about the woman from Woonsocket.

The woman from Woonsocket takes two buses to get to work. She gets off the second bus and meets a coworker who drives her the rest of the way to the stamping plant.

The woman is a patient at Hope Clinic/Climate Esperanza. So is the woman who was operating a stapling machine in a jewelry factory and drove a staple through her finger. And the landscaper with a skin infection who initially treated the condition by coating it with the contents of some pills a friend gave him.

"The clinic is for people who have been hard-working members of the community and because of the economy have fallen on hard times," says De Groot. "We're here to catch them."

She presides in this amazing place behind The Cuban Revolution on Valley Street in Providence. It was started five years ago by a group that included De Groot and others who had left the Rhode Island Free Clinic over differences with the way it was being run.

Its first home was in the basement of The Open Table of Christ on Broad Street, which has become a crossroads for those dealing most directly with the falling from hard times. De Groot remembers doing health screenings in the church's boiler room.

Now, the clinic is in a converted mill building where there is room to move. The waiting room, where patients wait on rows of wooden chairs, is sometimes used for exercise classes.

There are 660 people on the patient list, many of whom would not receive health care if not for the free clinic. Some would stay home, as they have before, and take an aspirin for pains that could be symptoms of all kinds of things. Some would pay for treatment out of pocket and thus not pay for food or perhaps rent. And some would go to an emergency room.

The fact that Hope Clinic/Climate Esperanza is on life support itself and in danger of closing in the middle of next month, is a sign of a growing problem for many nonprofits that do good and vital work on the most basic level. Funding sources are either drying up or cutting back. Services are being reduced. The eroding, common-sense approach to community problems is getting squeezed by the hard, cold statistics of a stumbling economy.

At times, De Groot and some of her board members have reached into their own pockets to cover immediate expenses, but the clinic needs help in much bigger ways or it will close its doors.

Before that is allowed to happen, people who could make a difference should visit. They should see the medical students and the volunteer doctors and nurses who come, because there is no experience quite like it anywhere else.

They should definitely meet the "Navigantes," they are, says De Groot, "the rocks on which we stand."

The Navigantes see it all and they see it first. They see the high blood pressure, the high blood sugar, the evidence of domestic violence, the fear that comes with being sick and poor. Every week, they go to the Open Table of Christ during the weekly food distribution and provide health information. They are bilingual. They understand the language and the culture, and they educate patients about the good and the bad. If necessary, they guide them to the people they need to see at the clinic. Beyond that, they know how to work through the often tricky process that allows the uninsured to get free services at hospitals.

"With domestic violence, sometimes it has been going on for a long, long time and they are scared," says Luz Betancur, one of the Navigantes. "I'll say to a woman, 'It's OK, I can find people to help you.'"

There are support groups she relies on. One woman, says Betancur, left her abuser and is living on her own. "I can get through to them," she says.

That's what happens. People get through. The clinic is in many ways a clinic in bringing people in from the unhealthy and often dangerous territory marked by language barriers, poverty and fear. One thing that is not asked of the people coming through the door is their immigration status.

On Thursday night, Ana Vargas, who worked in a jewelry factory until it closed, waited for her appointment, along with her husband, Juan. She has painful problems with her spine. He has high blood pressure. Both were seen by a doctor.

Ana Vargas says she first met De Groot at the Open Table of Christ and that brought her to the clinic.

"Dr. Annie, she gave me a gift," says Ana. "Thank God for Dr. Annie."

Vargas has signed up to be a clinic volunteer. Anything she can do for Clinic Esperanza she will do, she says.

De Groot has her own practice, teaches, does research and owns her own business. She says one of the great joys of running the clinic has been finding the large number of specialists all over the state who are willing to provide for free the kind of treatment for clinic patients that would otherwise be out of reach.

"We can leverage this altruism," she says.

But money is also needed. It costs about $20,000 a month to run the clinic. It seems a small amount to help hundreds of people enjoy healthier lives.

Not to mention the rich returns in simple human understanding.

"It's easy to get out of touch when we're at school," she says.

She is one of the volunteer medical students De Groot talks about, the ones who learn early about the woman from Woonsocket and her hard trip to work.

Chen is in her first year of medical school at Brown, where she also earned her undergraduate degree. She comes to the clinic twice a month. She and other students do intake — take vital signs, do preliminary examinations. And one night a month there is a student clinic where they see patients under the watchful eye of a doctor.

"It makes it a lot more real," she says.
Clinic needs a major shot of the right medicine

Dr. Arne de Cremer makes the rounds to reach the hundreds of patients who come to the clinic. He has a new plan to make the patients feel more comfortable.

The clinic is located at the Orange Community Health Center. As the team size grows, the clinic has to look for additional space.

There are a lot of people who come to the clinic, and some of them have unique needs. The clinic has to be flexible to accommodate these needs.

The clinic is run by a team of doctors and nurses, and they work together to provide the best care possible.

PHOTO: Bob Kerr

SCHOOLS

Continued from A1

Providence Journal, found school performance in certain areas of the city, such as test scores and graduation rates, to be lower than elsewhere.

School district administrators have begun to focus on improving these areas.

The high school has also implemented new programs to help students improve their grades. These programs include tutoring sessions and study groups.

Providence Journal, school administrators have been working to improve graduation rates. They have implemented new programs and strategies to help students complete their high school classes.

PHOTO: Bob Kerr

EDUCATION

Two years into federal grant program, grades aren't in

By ALISON KLEIN

Two years into the federal grant program, grades aren't in yet.

Advisors and counselors are working with students to help them succeed.

The students have been working on improving their grades. They have been attending tutoring sessions and studying extra hours.

The results of the students' hard work are starting to show. Some students have improved their grades significantly.

There are still some challenges to overcome. Some students have struggled with the new program and are not yet seeing the improvements they had hoped for.

In conclusion, the federal grant program has been a positive step for the school. Students have been working hard and their grades are starting to improve. The future looks promising for these students.