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Thank you for the opportunity to share my personal incite and experience as Executive Director of a nonprofit Healthcare facility.

VIM History and Information

Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) is a 501 c 3 community-based nonprofit organization established to provide primary & preventative medical, dental and behavioral health services to the working uninsured and underinsured populations in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Individuals eligible for free services, work with an income at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and have no access to affordable health insurance or medical care. In March of 2021, there were 703,300 uninsured adults or approximately 7% in Pennsylvania. It is estimated that almost three times that amount have no dental insurance. Higher uninsured rates reported were more among people of color, small business workers, people with low income and young adults.

The VIM in Wilkes-Barre began seeing patients in June of 2008 and has accomplished many milestones including the transition into a national certified Patient Medical Home. There are only 6 free clinics out of 1800 in the nation that has received this accreditation which validates our quality care.

Free services include not only primary but many specialty services including women's health, chiropractic services, physical therapy, chronic disease and medicine management, and nutritional education by a registered dietician. VIM dispenses medications with a value of \$50,000/month free to those that can't afford them. 100% of patients are offered preventative services at VIM which include colon cancer screenings, mammograms, cervical cancer screenings, dental cleanings and eye exams.

Lab work and imaging testing is also provided FREE to the patient (but a cost to VIM) to ensure continuity of care. A translation program is available to non-English speaking patients to guarantee understanding of their treatment plan.

The Behavioral Health Program at VIM includes a Social Worker, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner and Trained Screeners. Psychiatric evaluations, counseling, case management, and resource navigation are provided on a daily basis. The Health Equity Program assists patients with resolving transportation, housing, jobs and food disparities.

These services are provided FREE to the low income patient.

Dental Clinic

The VIM Dental Clinic was established in January of 2011 and quickly became a high demand community resource. Many patient's oral hygiene needs require a minimum of three appointments to relieve the pain. Our goal is to get them out of pain, educate on oral hygiene and on a bi-annual cleaning schedule. Due to the complexity of treatments required, we have a waiting list of those desperately needing services in the dental clinic that exceed 350 people. In 2021, we received a grant to hire a paid part time dentist which has helped with scheduling immediate appointments for emergency treatment. We currently also have 8 volunteer dentists that close their busy private practices to come to VIM and provide care to the uninsured patients.

We have found many parents and caregivers aren't educated on proper oral hygiene. If the adult isn't aware of how many times to brush their teeth, the importance of visiting the dentist or healthy eating, then the children in the household most likely aren't learning at a young age. We recently had a hardworking 35 year old father of two, have numerous visits in the dental clinic for cavities. After talking with him, he had no understanding that the energy drinks, soda and packets of sugar in his coffee throughout each and every day were causing the tooth decay.

In 2015, we created a Healthy Smile program to educate children on good oral hygiene as well as provide evaluations and program supplies. Our dental staff visits daycares, schools and agencies that host children and provides a fun and informative presentation on the importance of healthy teeth.

The Need

VIM in Wilkes-Barre is currently seeing an increase in new patients. Many have lost their full time job due to the pandemic and now have two or three part-time jobs with many losing health insurance. The clinic experienced a 50% increase in new patients needing services from January to August, 2021 compared to last year at this time.

Impact of VIM

Our main mission is to keep our community healthy, well and working. We work closely with our healthcare systems to keep patients out of the emergency rooms. Many uninsured individuals use the ER for non-emergent issues because they do not have a primary care provider. According to United Healthcare, the average cost of an ER visit in the United States is \$2200. Research conducted by the Texas A & M University School of Public Health, patients that go to the emergency room to treat preventable dental condition cost tax payers, hospitals and the government about \$2 billion a year. Both regional healthcare systems refer patients to VIM. Uninsured patients that visit the ER with dental abscesses are immediately referred to VIM for care.

As the **only full time, full service FREE clinic** in Northeastern Pennsylvania, VIM impacts the community by saving the local Emergency Departments over a million dollars per hospital in uncompensated care by the uninsured population.

The clinic is a critical community resource. In the last six months, provided **free healthcare** to employees at 136 businesses in Luzerne County. Students from 10 local universities/colleges are hosted at VIM for their official internships.

Medicare

A patient is eligible for free dental services at VIM if they have Medicare and still working even if it is limited part time and the household income is 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Our primary population is working uninsured, but VIM currently has 272 registered patients over 65 years of age receiving dental services.

Most older patients are in need of extractions and dentures. We have had patients come to VIM because they previously had teeth removed and can't afford dentures. Many have extreme difficulty eating solid food. One patient had numerous health issues needing medications to combat the problems. After she finished her dental treatment plan to rid her mouth of numerous infections, the medical provider was amazed at the positive changes. Her appearance was healthier and basically "cured" from her medical symptoms therefore able to stop some of her medications. We also provided dentures to a patient a couple days before her wedding. The patient said it was the first time that she smiled.

VIM receives constant calls from individuals that have Medicaid and can't find a healthcare provider and/or a dentist to see them. Our resource guide has only two local dentists accepting Medicaid. VIM staff and volunteers hear on a daily basis the struggles from all ages and races, the challenges in finding affordable health insurance, medical care, behavioral health and dental care. The services provided at VIM are otherwise unattainable to the low income population.

Conclusion

The Volunteers in Medicine Clinic offers a unique health care model that benefits the entire community. It is important to understand that in order to heal the entire wellbeing; medical, dental and behavioral health care needs to be provided especially to the low income, underserved populations. Everyone benefits from a healthy community.