

The Clinic with a Heart

Alum Rob Rhodes, M.D., helps those in need of health care in Nebraska

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Mission at Home

Rob Rhodes, M.D., and 'Clinic with a Heart' Serve Community of Lincoln

By Ben Carstens

Gustavo Ortiz has had trouble digesting sugary foods for the last few months. Currently unemployed and lacking health care, he complains of constant stomach irritation as he sits nervously in the back office at the Center for People in Need in Lincoln, Neb.

It's Tuesday night, and Ortiz is just one of 40 patients waiting to be treated at Clinic with a Heart, a weekly clinic designed to help people who don't have the means to help themselves in this Midwestern city of 250,000.

Staffed by volunteer doctors, nurses and community members, the clinic sets up in various offices at the Center. A dentist in the front window office, a physical therapist in the small office across the hall, an optometrist next door and a mental health provider in the back next to a makeshift pharmacy set up behind a long folding table in a meeting room. Volunteers frantically move from station to station taking down information and vitals, before patients see the physicians they need - sometimes more than one in a night.

Ortiz tells his problems to the doctor

sitting across the desk from him in a small side office. Listening and diagnosing his ailments is his health care provider for the evening, area family physician Rob Rhodes, M.D. Rhodes, president and founder of the clinic and alumnus of The University of South Dakota ('90 B.S., '92 B.S.M.D., '94 M.D.), runs through a series of questions with Ortiz before taking him back to the lab to be tested for diabetes.

"We see more patients now due to the economy," says Rhodes, whose clinic expects to see more than 2,000 patients this year, up from 1,400 last year. "The number of uninsured people in the area is growing and they don't know where to turn for health coverage. They're looking for help and direction, and we try to provide them with that."



Rob Rhodes, M.D., explains to patient Gustavo Ortiz his options at Clinic with a Heart.

It's good news for Ortiz on this night, he tests negative for diabetes, and Rhodes may have found a solution for his stomach problems he explains as he scratches on his prescription pad. He tells Ortiz to go to the clinic pharmacy to get some items and tells him to take the prescription to the nearest Walmart where the clinic will pick up the tab. He also refers him to The People's Health Center, a federally-funded, non-profit community health center that charges on a sliding scale.

"I wish we could do more for you here, my friend," Rhodes says as he shakes

the man's hand and sends him on his way with a smile before scanning the room for the next patient in line.

Medical Missionaries

Clinic with a Heart was an idea planted in Rhodes' head when he traveled with his church to Reynosa, Mexico, back in 2002 on a medical mission trip. Rhodes knew that he could take that experience and bring it home to put to work in his own back yard. He wanted to give people the opportunity to feel the immense pleasure and satisfaction he got from the mission trip, without having to

travel across the world.

Call it a mission at home.

For more than five years now Rhodes and his group of medical missionaries, more than 450 volunteers at present, have seen more than 5,000 patients in the community. With seven clinics a month, Rhodes is quick to sing the praises of the numerous doctors, nurses and members of the community who pitch in to make it all possible.

"The volunteers are really the ones who make this thing work," says Rhodes. "It's amazing the time they give to help these people in need."

glimpse into the field.

Zaneta Calhoun, a pharmacy technician and nursing student, volunteers her time on Tuesdays from 5-7:30 p.m. She admits that the services provided are something she could have used a few years back.

"I really wish I would have known about this place," Calhoun says. "There was a time when I definitely could have used the services here when I didn't have insurance. I actually found out about this place when I brought a friend to the clinic. I ran into some people I knew

that were volunteering and decided to help out."

Finding a Medical Home

The clinic is sponsored and funded by seven local churches and other corporate sponsors, according to Teresa Harms, executive director. Clinic with a Heart also partners with local hospitals, Labcorp, Advanced Medical Imaging and National Research Corporation. They hold two public fundraisers throughout the year - a golf tournament and their Rx for Hope Banquet.

Rob Rhodes, M.D.

Age:
41

Family:
Single, uncle to six nieces and nephews and godfather to 12.
Parents live on a farm near Fort Dodge, Iowa

Hobbies:
Travel, golf, music, men's prayer group

Heroes:
Sanjay Gupta, Ronald Reagan, Hawkeye Pierce, Tom Brokaw, his parents

Education:

Residency, Lincoln Family Practice/University of Nebraska Medical Center	1994 -1997
M.D., Sanford School of Medicine	1994
B.S., Medicine, The University of South Dakota	1992
B.S., Biology, The University of South Dakota	1990

Career Highlights:

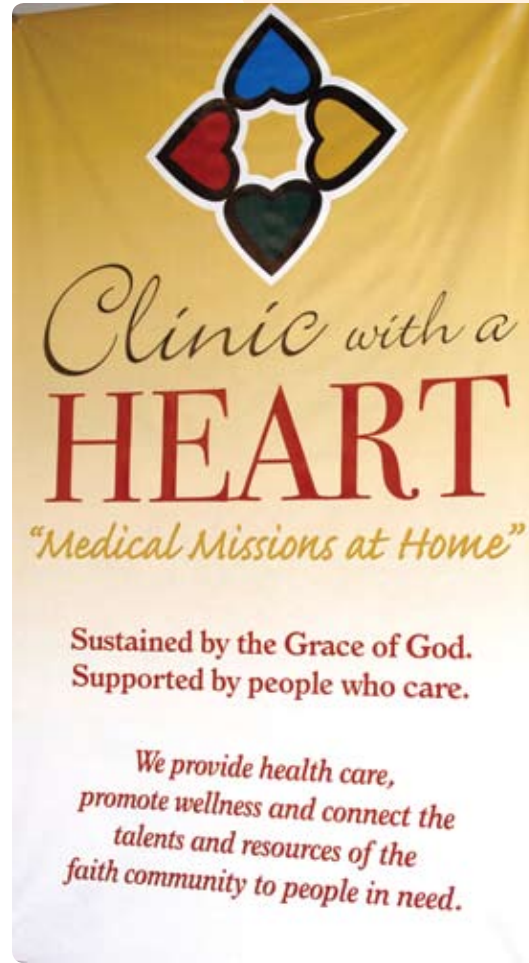
Founder and president, Clinic with a Heart, Lincoln, Neb.	2003 - present
Medical consultant - Health Data Card	2003 - present
Medical consultant - Samaritan Counseling Center	2003 - present
Chair of family medicine department - St. Elizabeth Hospital	2003 - 2005

Service Highlights:

Men's Health Network National Board of Advisors- Washington, D.C.	2005 - present
Chairperson, Nebraska Medical Association, Men's Health Section	2004 - present
Saint Paul School of Theology National Board of Trustees	2004 - 2008
The University of South Dakota Foundation Board of Trustees	2004 - 2007

Honors Highlights:

Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow	2008
Midlands Business Journal 40 Under 40 Award	2007
American Medical Association Foundation's Excellence in Medicine Award	2007
Nebraska Medical Association 2000 Young Physician of the Year	2000



Coyote Clinic: Our Very Own Clinic with a Heart

For Aaron Graumann, the Coyote Clinic is an experience that continues to be as rewarding in his fourth year as a Sanford School of Medicine student as it was in his first year.

“Every clinic night is unique,” Graumann said. “Each night serves as a reminder why this service is so important. Our patients are usually quite thankful for the care they receive, and so it’s an especially good feeling to help those who need it most.”

In 2006, a group of medical students - Cassie Hajek, Michael Lankhorst, Rob Miller, Jennifer Nelson, Chris Shaw, Heather Spader, Shariq Zaidi - founded the clinic as a way to fill a need in the community by providing free health care. They also saw a chance to enhance their educational experience.

The second Tuesday of every month, the clinic is operated by medical students from 6-9 p.m. It serves as an extension of the Avera Downtown Free Clinic in Sioux Falls. In addition to the clinical space, Avera McKennan provides two staff members as well as the cost of laboratory tests and imaging.

A core group of medical students volunteer to organize and run the Coyote Clinic. Medical students in all four classes volunteer to staff the clinic. Students in their first year shadow patients. Second-year students bring patients back to the exam room and take vitals. Third- and fourth-year students do focused histories and physicals and present their cases to an

attending physician.

Doctors from Avera, Sanford and the VA have all volunteered to serve as attending physicians. “They have been fantastic,” Graumann said. “We could not operate without them.”

Graumann said each attending physician teaches the students in a different way. For example, he said, Bob Talley, M.D., frequently asks students to think through the physiology of a case. James Barker, M.D., insists that students are thorough and scientific in their approach. And Kevin Whittle, M.D., peppers students with common board exam questions. “The diversity of the attending physicians that we have makes each night a chance to learn new things and gain a new perspective,” Graumann said.

In addition to learning about medicine, the core group of students operating the clinic have learned about health care administration. “I have been surprised again and again by the complexity of running a clinic,” Graumann said. “There is a lot that goes into this aspect of medicine, and it’s something that you are not commonly exposed to as a student.”

Rodney R. Parry, M.D., dean of the medical school, said the clinic is an impressive endeavor. “Service is one of the three missions of the medical school, and it’s extraordinary to see these students taking that to heart,” Parry said. •

“I think the need is greater now because of the scary economic time we are in, but the need has always been there,” Harms said. “The economy has put a spotlight on Clinic with a Heart which has led a lot of people to us who needed help before it went bad. A lot of these people will still need us after things get better too.”

Rhodes says the goal of the clinic is to help people find a medical home. The volunteer doctors make referrals for the patients to see people in the Lincoln community who charge them at the Medicare rate or lower, if possible. Patients are limited to three visits a year to the clinic, so it isn’t intended to be long-term care.

“The relationship we have with our county medical society refers patients into a rotation with doctors in different specialties,” Rhodes says. “This allows community physicians the opportunity to help the uninsured, but in a way they don’t feel the burden that they are the only ones taking care of those patients.”

The participation rate of doctors within the community has been outstanding, according to Harms.

“It’s extraordinary to see what people are giving of themselves,” Harms says. “It’s amazing to see how this all connects and how everyone works together. We are pretty efficient for the size we are.”

Passion for Helping

When asking around the clinic, it becomes pretty clear why it’s been successful in its goal to not only help people in need, but get people involved in helping those less fortunate.

“Rob is so passionate about his work and he has influenced a lot of other people with that passion,” says Lee Hetrick, a friend of Rhodes and development director for the clinic. “It’s heartwarming to see where this has all gone.”

Calhoun says that she knows her work and everyone else’s is appreciated every time they walk in the clinic doors.

“No matter how busy he is or what

else is going on, Dr. Rob will make sure to shake everyone’s hand and thank them for coming to help out,” Calhoun says. “He has the personality that draws people in and makes them want to do this work.”

According to Hetrick, Rhodes hopes to someday take the model he has created at Clinic with a Heart and share it with other communities so they can start to serve their underprivileged as well. In 2006, Rhodes had the opportunity to do so when he traveled to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina to work with a church setting up New Orleans’ only free clinic, Luke’s House. With continued help from volunteers, sponsors and hospitals - the goal of setting up more clinics in the Midwest may not be far away.

Of course, as Rhodes said in a recent interview on CNN, when it comes to the need for having medical clinics like his, he’d “love to be put out of business.” •

Visit the Clinic with a Heart Web site at www.clinicwithaheart.org.



Dental Services Now Offered

Qualifying patients at the Coyote Clinic now have access to dental services from USD’s Department of Dental Hygiene of the School of Health Sciences.

A \$1,500 donation from the Avera Health Foundation and an alumnus of the dental hygiene program will make the dental services available as long as the funding lasts. Patients who qualify receive a voucher for services at the USD dental clinic in downtown Sioux Falls.

“We’re excited to be able to offer our services in conjunction with the Coyote Clinic,” Ann Brunick, RDH, chair of the dental hygiene program, said. The program’s downtown dental clinic began operation in January 2008. It is located in the building that houses most Minnehaha County services. •