



Second-year pharmacy student Mindy Bauer and first-year medical student Chris Luty review a patient profile at Southside Clinic in Madison.

MEDiC

Exposing pharmacy students to interdisciplinary care for underserved patients

by Andrea Carter and Anne Szulczewski

It is Saturday morning and while most students are still in bed, MEDiC volunteers are taking blood pressures and patient histories. By noon, nearly 15 patients have been seen and treated or referred to other providers. Thanks to the dedication of these students and faculty volunteers, patients who would normally be left untreated are given access to the health care that they need.

The MEDiC organization, established in 1990 by first and second year medical students at the University of Wisconsin, was developed to bring health care to underserved and disadvantaged populations in the Madison community. Since its inception, it has grown to include six clinics which are staffed by volunteer faculty physicians and over 200 students from multiple health care-related disciplines. The goal of the MEDiC organization is to complement the education of health professional students by allowing them to participate actively in patient care and to

gain awareness of the social, economic and access issues affecting these populations.

Each week, several pharmacy students take advantage of this opportunity to help in the community and further their education. While there are six operating clinics, pharmacy students are currently involved at only two. The Salvation Army clinic was established in 1991 under the direction of Murray Katcher MD, PhD, its current medical director. This clinic serves women and children who are staying in the shelter with acute medical problems such as ear and upper respiratory infections. At this site no formal medical facilities exist, so converted offices and tackle boxes filled with supplies are used to provide care. The other clinic with pharmacy student involvement, Southside Clinic, is unique in that it serves a racially and culturally diverse population. As many of the patients are Spanish-speaking, interpreters are available on-site to assist volunteers in providing care. It operates out of the Madison Community

Health Center which has multiple well-equipped exam rooms. Each of these clinics operates once weekly and utilizes approximately ten volunteers, two of which are pharmacy students.

MEDiC strives to decrease the many barriers that block underserved populations from accessing needed health care services. "Homeless people generally do not have transportation and they do not have funds to purchase pharmaceuticals," says Katcher. "They often cannot navigate through the complexities of the health care system, so taking the clinic to them overcomes the transportation barrier." Third-year pharmacy student Ryan Mickelson hopes to pursue a career working to help those who are medically underserved domestically and internationally. "My experiences at MEDiC have provided me with the opportunity to work with medically needy individuals," says Mickelson, "and has given me a glimpse into the issues that they face concerning access to health care and communication obstacles."

A TEAM APPROACH TO PATIENT CARE

Each day that the clinic is open, students actively participate in the care that is provided to these underserved populations. Although each clinic has its own character, patients receive organized and coordinated care by interacting first with students and then with physicians on staff. Pharmacy students who volunteer at MEDiC are paired up with students from other disciplines. These interdisciplinary teams are given a patient case which includes information about past visits to the clinic, demographic information and the purpose of the patient's visit that day. Teams then meet with the patient and use their specific skills to get the information necessary to either treat or refer the patient. Upon questioning the patient, subjective information is gathered and recorded in a standardized patient chart. In addition, a basic physical exam is performed. Usually the students work to divide the tasks according to their specialties.

Pharmacy students concentrate on medication-related problems as well as disease state management issues. Medical, physician assistant, physical therapy and nursing students practice their physical exam skills, although all students are

encouraged to participate in all aspects of care. After the initial visit with the patient, the case is presented to the volunteer physician. Upon discussion with the physician, students often realize that they failed to ask some of the pertinent questions required to diagnose the problem and develop a treatment plan. The physician-led team returns to see the patient for a second time. At this point the students are given the opportunity to ask additional questions of the patient. They also learn through observing the methods used by the physician in completing the physical examination and patient interview. The team then leaves the patient to discuss possible treatment options.

Once the appropriate treatment is determined, the students return to the patient to discuss the plan. Pharmacy students are often utilized to educate the patient about the medications they are receiving and how to use them safely and effectively. Care is taken in the final patient encounter to ensure that the treatment is tailored to patient specific needs.

The MEDiC clinics have multiple avenues for providing patients with further care and medications. Certain providers in the Madison area are generous enough to provide complimentary treatment for a set amount of referred MEDiC patients per month. Patients gain access to medications prescribed at MEDiC in several ways. If patients have insurance or the resources to pay, they are given a prescription to take to their pharmacy. Uninsured patients, or patients who cannot afford necessary medication, have two options available to them. First, each clinic has its own drug cabinet that is stocked with acute care medications acquired through donations or purchased with MEDiC's medication budget. If medications are available in the drug cabinet that can meet patient needs, an effort is made to use them. A second option is available due to the generosity of several area pharmacies. Community Pharmacy [see related story on page 57] and Schafer Pharmacy will accept prescriptions written at MEDiC and will bill MEDiC at a discounted rate. The patient pays no out-of-pocket cost for these prescriptions. Each individual has a \$50 lifetime limit and the prescriptions can only be written for acute conditions. Two local Walgreens stores will also bill

MEDiC without a charge to the patient.

A REWARDING LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A very important piece of the learning aspect of MEDiC is the group wrap-up that takes place once all the patients have been seen and treated. Here students have the chance to present their cases to the group. The physician will highlight several important points from each case spurring a group discussion. First-year pharmacy student, Melissa Natzke, states, "Dr. Katcher's lectures help to reinforce what I am learning in school. They help motivate me to learn as much as I can because I can see where it is all starting to fit together." The MEDiC experience helps students to improve not only their clinical knowledge but also their communications skills. "The more I volunteer, the more comfortable I am asking questions and talking with the patients which will not only help me in school but also as a pharmacist," reflects Natzke.

The team approach to patient care used at MEDiC allows for a more effective learning experience as well as a more complete examination of the patient. Third-year pharmacy student Ryan Mickelson feels that MEDiC offers him a rare opportunity to collaborate with students from other professions and learn about their different roles in the health care system and in the patient-provider relationship. This is exactly what Katcher envisioned for these clinics. "Students get a model

to see what other health professional students know, how they are trained and how they approach the patient," he says, "so when they practice in their career they can appreciate the importance of teamwork and each special contribution."

Meghan Pesko, student coordinator of Southside Clinic adds, "MEDiC gives us the chance to be a part of a team. It's really amazing what we learn from each other. The more we work together as students, the better we will be able to appreciate what other health professionals can do for our patients. We will also be better able to communicate with each other. All of these things should have a positive impact on the future of health care by providing more comprehensive, all-around care for our patients."

The MEDiC experience is rewarding for the students who participate. "Some of the stories I have heard from patients are heartbreaking," reflects Natzke. "I am glad I can help give people something they need when they have so little. This experience will always stay with me and remind me to give back to the community when I am a pharmacist." Student perspectives such as these prove that MEDiC is meeting its goals of reaching underserved communities while enhancing the education of health care students. ●

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Stamos Wins National APhA-ASP Award

The Mortar and Pestle Professionalism Award is an honor that APhA-ASP (Academy of Student Pharmacists) bestows upon student pharmacists who exhibit characteristics inherent in a professional. Each chapter from around the country may nominate one member to receive the APhA-ASP Mortar and Pestle Professionalism Award. These nominees are then eligible to participate in the essay contest.

APhA-ASP recognized Emily Stamos, a 2005 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy, with the Mortar and Pestle Professionalism Award. Stamos has been an involved member of APhA-ASP since her DPH-1 year. She has demonstrated exceptional service and commitment to the profession of pharmacy through involvement in professional organizations, at the school, state and national level.

Stamos also won the essay contest, in which many participants wrote an essay relating professionalism and diversity, the theme for the 2005-2006 school year. The laminated plaque and a \$2000 scholarship to be applied towards continuing education were presented to her in March in San Francisco at the APhA-ASP closing awards ceremony.