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Valley Youth House: A Partnership with the Lehigh Valley Health Network Campus of University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine

Taylor Jarvill

Lehigh Valley Health Network, Taylor.Jarvill@lvhn.org

Jeffrey Downen

Lehigh Valley Health Network, Jeffrey.Downen@lvhn.org

Brittney Gaudet

Brittney.Gaudet@lvhn.org

Nina Liu

Nina.Liu@lvhn.org

Amy B. Smith PhD

Lehigh Valley Health Network, amy_b.smith@lvhn.org

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Taylor Jarvill; Jeffrey Downen; Brittney Gaudet; Nina Liu; Amy B. Smith PhD; and Marna R. Greenberg DO, MPH, FACEP

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Taylor Jarvill, Jeffrey Downen, Brittney Gaudet, Nina Liu, Amy B. Smith, PhD, Marna Rayl Greenberg, DO, MPH
Department of Education, University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine LVHN Campus, Allentown, PA

27.3%

poverty rate of families
in Allentown, PA

60+

USF MCOM medical
students volunteered

500

physical exams provided
to homeless adolescents

Importance

The most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Allentown, Pennsylvania has an astonishing 27.3% poverty rate, more than twice the national average, with a median household income of \$38.5k. With poverty contributing to housing insecurity, this data lends to a national trend, with the Council on Community Pediatrics noting approximately 1.6 million young Americans face housing insecurity annually. Valley Youth House (VYH) combats this by providing a home for vulnerable, abused, and homeless youth in Allentown, PA and has been designated a National Safe Place. The Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) Campus of University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine (USF MCOM) partners with VYH by providing state-mandated physical exams (PE) and acute care visits at bimonthly medical student (MS) run volunteer clinics.

Objective

The clinic's goal is to improve the lives of the adolescents housed at VYH, with an emphasis on physical well-being. By partnering USF MCOM with VYH, this crisis housing can continue to provide care for youth with housing instability while appropriately addressing the residents' medical needs. Furthermore, the clinic promotes volunteerism, community involvement, and service to underserved populations, with the goal that MSs will take these traits into residency and beyond.

Methods

Bimonthly, third and fourth year MSs from USF MCOM conduct a clinic at the VYH shelter. MS3s and MS4s serve as clinic directors responsible for coordinating student volunteers and managing systemic issues of the clinic. VYH residents receive a PE, with emphasis on assessing for communicable diseases and psychiatric health. Additionally, MSs counsel VYH residents on preventive health topics including substance use and sexually transmitted infections. Volunteer attendings from LVHN precept encounters and arrange for further medical care as needed through informal networking provided by the social workers at VYH and the LVHN Street Medicine team.

Results

For over four years, USF MCOM MSs have provided PEs at VYH for approximately 500 individual housing insecure or homeless adolescents. Over 60 students volunteered their time to engage with this vulnerable population. The student clinic directors organize fundraising events for medications, perform quality improvement strategies to maximize patient care, and participate in plans that best meet the requirements set forth by the state for VYH accreditation. This provides MSs numerous opportunities to take health systems education from the classroom to the bedside.

Conclusion

The partnership between USF MCOM and VYH provides a MS run volunteer clinic that serves vulnerable, abused, and homeless youth. These patients receive medical care and MSs cultivate a sense of giving back to the local community, with a focus on vulnerable youth. For future directions, the clinic is currently examining vaccination deficiencies and associations with demographic and biopsychosocial factors.