

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Awardee

Pediatric Prevention Clinic

2021

Cares Student-run free clinic located at Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC)

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In 2018 this pediatric prevention effort was launched by the CARES clinic in response to a community need that had been identified by adult patients cared for at the CARES (free) clinic. In the state of South Carolina, individuals without documentation of residency or US citizenship are not eligible for federally funded healthcare programs or assistance. Unfortunately, this also included their children. Simultaneously, all children who attend school or daycare are required to meet mandated vaccination guidelines set out and enforced by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). Through patient outreach, the CARES clinic identified an unmet need in the community where children of parents unable to afford vaccinations at out-of-pocket cost were both at risk for school suspension and also adding to public health concerns due to missing childhood preventive vaccines.

Through the support of a generous donor, the clinic was launched in 2018. Since then, the CARES clinic has partnered with the Charleston County School District (CCSD) nurses and staff to identify students at risk for suspension due to their vaccine status not being up to date. At varying intervals, typically every 2-3 months, the clinic holds a large mass vaccination event that includes documentation of current vaccine status, provision of DHEC mandated vaccines and provision of recommended vaccines if indicated (for example, Gardasil) as well as complete documentation within the state's immunization record system. The CARES clinic has successfully registered in the federal Vaccines For Children (VFC) program to assist in the cost of continuing to provide vaccines to children in need. During 2020 the prior model of the clinic had to be revised in order to comply with COVID-19 precautions. Each vaccine clinic event in the past year has reached between 60-193 children each time and administering up to 550 vaccines in a single clinic event. The most recent clinic held on October 5th, 2020 saw 183 children successfully receiving their vaccinations which totaled greater than 450 in number.

Students and their families largely have Spanish as their primary preferred language, and most are uninsured. The team that is needed for successful implementation and execution of this clinic consists entirely of volunteers including professional and preprofessional students, licensed medical personnel, CCSD nursing staff, CCSD general and maintenance staff, community health workers and Hispanic community liaisons. The interprofessional and sociocultural nature of this clinical experience has been unmatched by other domestic volunteer experiences at the University for professional students. Through this novel partnership of the CARES free clinic and CCSD, the PPC has been able to both address the risk of school suspension based on vaccination status, as well as avert possible public health crises stemming from rising numbers of unvaccinated children.