



# *From the Heart*

Heart of Virginia Free Clinic Newsletter

Farmville, Virginia December 2021

## **From Dr. Mary Donovan**

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Here's my story of how I came to work at the Heart of Virginia Free Clinic, what I learned, and why you should be proud to be involved.

After I retired from thirty wonderful years as a family physician in Burkeville, I had vague thoughts about volunteering at HOVFC, but I also had some reservations.

Over the past decades working in health care, I had learned that "free" can be a dangerous concept. There are not pill addicts of any sort who do not assiduously seek out the fastest and cheapest way to access the drugs that are destroying them. "Free" can also attract extremely confused, disorganized homeless souls who cannot be helped without a robust psychiatric care that integrates drug treatment and social work providers. Though "free" also attracts wonderful folks who need some help, the first two groups often quickly soak up all the available time and resources.

Still, I finally decided to volunteer—well, let me be honest: Traffic Court offered me a choice of driving school or volunteer work. My choice of volunteer work has been a blessing to me.

Whoever set up the ground rules at the HOVFC was a genius, for since we do not prescribe any governmentally-controlled medications, no one comes seeking them. All our patients work (some at two jobs and at least one at three) or are short-term unemployed. Most work at one of the many small businesses that do not offer healthcare insurance or that cannot afford to subsidize the costs of medical care for their employees.

Modern medicine is truly a remarkable treasure. It is satisfying for doctors to treat a migraine or asthma in patients who have never had these conditions managed. Modern

medicine can control migraines and asthma; the main obstacle is the cost of medications—

typically more than \$400 a month. Less immediately rewarding for doctors but more important is stabilizing kidney disease by controlling diabetes and hypertension.

Diagnosing breast cancer is rewarding for doctors when the cancer is in an early stage and is treatable, but it is disheartening to treat patients with an advanced disease that earlier care might well have prevented.

Many of our patients "graduate" from the clinic when they find new jobs or when they qualify for the Affordable Health Care Act or the Medicaid Expansion. It is a relief for them and for us when they acquire genuine insurance, principally since many of them need subspecialty care or advanced imaging that we are not able to provide. Even so, we have often become such good friends with our "graduates" that it is hard to see them leave.

And here's a last wonderful thing: many of our patients do not want to leave us! HOVFC is such a warm place, and the staff provide so much support and coordination, that the free market can in comparison seem intimidating.

I'll leave you with an illustrative happy image. A very cooperative patient with low literacy and a complicated pill regimen comes in for his weekly get-together with Pat Payne. She fills his pillboxes, checks his blood pressure, and offers him some of the delicious food our support network of church ladies has supplied. He tells her stories and jokes. They laugh together. The shared moment is the week's highlight for both.

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it" (Ecclesiastes 11:1), and "Have a blessed Christmas."

—Mary Donovan, Medical Director  
December 2021

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**Medical Volunteers**

Mary Donovan, MD  
 Girish Purohit, MD  
 Joy Price, RN, FNP  
 Mary Ann Pruitt, RN, FNP  
 Martha Vesterlund, DNP  
 Martha Bowyer, MSN  
 Deanna Hammer, RN

## Hampden-Sydney Class on Philanthropy Finds Continued Funding for Mammograms

IN EARLY 2021, THE Susan G. Komen Foundation, which had funded mammograms for 300 of our patients since 2014, notified the HOVFC that it would no longer fund mammograms for patients at non-profit clinics like ours but would instead devote

its resources to research at universities with allied medical facilities. At Hampden-Sydney College, Dylan Robertson and Michael Thornton, students in "Philanthropy Through Giving," a class taught by Dr. Saranna Thornton of the Department of Economics, learning the story of a patient at the HOVFC whose breast cancer had been discovered by a mammogram this year and understanding the Clinic's dire need to continue providing the screening, convinced their classmates to award the Clinic a grant of \$6000 from the class's endowment for philanthropies to pay for mammograms the following year. Past grants from this class have contributed to the Clinic's rent and grant-writing, as well as patient-expenses for eyeglasses, dentures, and medical testing. The Clinic extends its heartfelt thanks to Dr. Thornton, students Robertson and Thornton, and the entire class for their efforts on our behalf.

## Power Outage Unveils Flooding at HOVFC

DURING A POWER OUTAGE last winter, two staff members of the Free Clinic spent a few nights at the clinic to stay warm after their homes had lost power. Their stay proved serendipitous when they discovered that a large section in the back of the clinic was flooded. They used a shop vacuum and a few adult diapers that had been donated to the Clinic to remove the standing water. A foundation specialist who was called in concluded that the water had entered the building because of the hydrostatic pressure from the steep incline behind the parking lot and recommended the installation of a French drain to divert the winter ice-melt and rains. Work is planned to start soon. Donations are welcome to help with the expense.

## Caring—Free Clinic Style

AT THE HEART OF VIRGINIA FREE CLINIC, we see patients with many different combinations of medical problems. They come to us after they have been discharged from hospitals both local and out-of-town. They might come to us because after being seen at an hand to see a family physician and they lack after losing their employer-sponsored health business or has downsized as a result of come to us when they have immigrated to who will see them without health insurance or



Emergency Room they do not have cash in medical insurance. Or they might come to us insurance when their employer has gone out of Covid's effect on the economy. Or they might America and are unaware of another provider enough cash for medical care.

Once a woman came to have her breathing capacity assessed because she was using a device in her car that would not allow the car to start unless she could exhale forcefully to test for alcohol. We have treated auto mechanics with lung problems caused by years of breathing asbestos dust, petroleum fumes, and paint mist. We have treated many overweight people who developed Type II diabetes after a life of poor dietary choices. We see people every day with high blood pressure from drinking too much alcohol, smoking, eating too much salt, taking in too much caffeine, or all of the above. We see people who suffer from anxiety that results from sleep problems or from trauma or violence in their families. We help reduce visits to hospital emergency rooms by managing chronic diseases and thus preventing the health crises which cause great suffering and economic distress.

The Free Clinic's networking that benefits our patients is extensive. It ranges from free consultations with local specialists to dental care at the Free Clinic of Central Virginia, the Powhatan Free Clinic, the Central Virginia Community Health Center, and the Lunenburg Medical Center. Thanks to private grants we are able to provide mammograms, often to patients who have never had one. When breast cancer is detected, we refer our patients to Every Woman's Life, an outstanding program at St. Francis Hospital. Two local optical doctors see our patients for free or at greatly reduced prices. And thanks to private grants, we have provided eyeglasses or dentures to patients who need them. We have a staff member who accompanies patients with hearing problems to their appointments to help with communications using sign language. We have a patient who speaks fluent Spanish who volunteers to help with interpretation when a patient has limitations speaking English but understands Spanish. We are blessed with the work of Girish Purohit, a beloved retired local cardiologist, who voluntarily sees all of our patients with cardiac problems. We have connected patients with the FACES food bank, Piedmont Senior Resources, the Crisis Pregnancy Center, and Virginia Legal Aide. And we provide information about our community's resources to the callers who keep our phone ringing all day long.

Until this past year we received no funding from the federal government. In 2021, we were fortunate to receive a total over \$22,000 in Covid Relief Funds from the counties of Prince Edward, Buckingham, Charlotte, Appomattox, and Amelia, which has helped us to pay for deep-cleaning, face masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, disinfectant supplies, and operational expenses that have increased from the requirement for radiological and cardiac testing no longer provided to us free of charge by Centra Health. The stress of providing Covid care has resulted in Centra Health's limiting the extent of the advanced testing that it used to provide to the Clinic free of charge. Centra continues, however, to provide us grants to purchase equipment and supplies to support care for diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, and obesity.

We shall continue to appeal to our community's churches, civic clubs, businesses, and individuals in order to help fill in the gaps in medical care that exist for the uninsured in our community. Since 2012 we have done much, but there is still so very much left to do.

Pat Payne, RN, Executive Director



### Suggested Donations

#### Unopened over-the-counter medicines:

✓ aspirin	✓ Prilosec	✓ cough syrup	✓ cough drops	✓ Naprosyn
✓ Tylenol	✓ Tagamet	✓ Aleve	✓ multi-vitamins	✓ Benadryl

#### Gently used and cleaned:

✓ shower benches	✓ wheelchairs	✓ walkers	✓ bedside commode
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#### Other items:

✓ unused diapers	✓ hand sanitizer	✓ unused bedpans	✓ liquid hand soap
✓ bottled water	✓ paper lunch bags	✓ paper towels	✓ plastic cups, plates, bowls
✓ dish detergent.	✓ non latex gloves.	✓ face masks	✓ disinfectant

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Cricket Edmonson, local artist and retired school teacher, painted a beautiful "tree of life" on our waiting room wall (see photo below). The leaves on this special tree bear the names of individuals whose family or friends have given gifts to our clinic as memorials in their name. We are blessed and honored when families who have lost loved ones ask their friends to support the clinic with memorial gifts.

*Won't you please join us in our mission to serve the uninsured?*

Ways to donate: Monthly \$\_\_\_\_\_ Annually \$\_\_\_\_\_ Once \$\_\_\_\_\_ Memorial gift \$\_\_\_\_\_

*visit us at our website or on facebook for news and updates.*



Our Executive Director, Pat Payne, is available to talk to your church or civic club to share information about our clinic and all the services we offer there.

**Free Services Include:**

- appointments with a doctor or nurse practitioner
- medicine as prescribed by our medical providers
- counseling from a licensed nutritionist
- eye exams and eyeglasses if prescribed
- dental appointments [up to four for free]
- x-rays
- mammograms
- lab tests as ordered by our medical providers
- EKG if ordered by our medical provider
- pulmonary function test if ordered by our medical provider

**Additional Volunteers**

Bob Webber, PhD  
Donna Andrews  
Cricket Edmonson  
Rachel Price  
Margaret Leggett  
Jayne Fanshaw  
Vickie Oakes  
Dylan Robertson  
Michael Thornton  
Virginia Johnston

**cooks from:**

New Life Church  
Farmville Methodist Church  
Farmville Presbyterian Church  
Heritage Baptist Church  
Trinity Memorial Church  
Bread of Life Church

**Masters of Stew and Chili**

David Emert  
Ken Cook  
Cindy Emert  
Peggy Emert

**To be eligible for our services**, you must be between the ages of 18 and 65 and live in Prince Edward, Cumberland, Buckingham, Charlotte, Nottoway, Amelia, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, or Appomattox County, and your household income must be below 250% of the Federal Poverty Level. To ensure your eligibility for the services, please schedule an interview at our office.