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arlington freeclinic CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

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arlington freeclinic 2014 SPRING NEWSLETTER

NEWS

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

The Arlington Free Clinic you're connected with today looks very different from the 1994 walk-in clinic housed in Thomas Jefferson Middle School. Over the past two decades, we've moved in and out of spaces, added programs and expanded services. Thousands of new patients, volunteers and partners have joined us along the way, all playing an important part in driving our mission forward.



We're using our 20th Anniversary as an opportunity to both celebrate what's been accomplished and to look to the future. We hope you've enjoyed glimpses of our past in the 20th Anniversary Book, in special e-updates and on social media. Thanks for sharing your own memories with us, too! Amidst all the anniversary nostalgia, it seems like everyone wants to know how the Clinic got its start.

recruiting physician volunteers, thanks to state legislation that provided malpractice coverage for pro bono care. Dr. Backer sent a survey out to ACMS physicians asking if they would help if a free clinic in Arlington was organized. Nearly 50% said yes. Three physicians formed the initial Board of Directors, Drs. Gordon Avery, Joseph A. Backer and Archie McPherson, and they moved ahead with drafting Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws.



It was 1992 and physicians with the Arlington County Medical Society (ACMS) recognized a large increase in the number of patients who were having trouble paying their bills. Some had been laid off in the economic downturn of the early 1990s and others were refugees new to the U.S., who were escaping political unrest in their home countries.

The first task was to find a place to provide Clinic services. Dr. Stephen Sheehy approached Larry Grove, Principal of Thomas Jefferson Middle School, who embraced the idea. He offered the school hallways as a waiting room and the nurse's office for exam rooms. Given that during our first four years we had exam tables sized for middle school students, our adult patients were amazing sports!



Joseph A. Backer, MD was asked by the president of the ACMS to oversee the newly formed Indigent Care Committee. The Committee learned that other communities in Virginia were beginning to start free clinics. These clinics were successful in

Nancy Sanger Pallesen was hired in October 1993 as the Executive Director, and she organized everything needed to operate

continued on page 2 •



From the top, clockwise: (First three photos) Volunteers and staff at Thomas Jefferson in 1994 • First Board of Directors • Stephen J. Sheehy, MD, first Medical Director of AFC • Newspaper clipping from 1994

[A PATIENT'S STORY: LIVING AND THRIVING]

18-year-old Enji stared at the nurse as her mind circled back to what she'd just heard. The public health nurse sitting across from Enji's mom waited quietly for Enji to translate. Waited for Enji to explain in Mongolian that her mother's recent mammogram was abnormal. That they needed to see a doctor immediately.



Enji and her Mom, Galai

Enji's racing mind was asking, "does this mean my mom has breast cancer?" Meanwhile the thoughts of her 40-year-old mother, Galai, flashed toward another concern: "What will this mean for my daughters?" Galai's mind then focused on the immediate obstacle: "How will we pay for this?" Even though Galai and her husband both work, their income is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and their jobs don't provide insurance. And so started a difficult and confusing journey through an unfamiliar health care system, that only seemed to lead to closed doors and bad news.

With Galai under AFC's care, Enji could step back – from every other role except that of loving daughter.

Since she became our patient, Galai has received three surgeries, including reconstruction, all provided pro bono by AFC volunteer physicians. And since AFC has telephone language line services, a Mongolian translator able to help Galai communicate during her appointments is just a phone call away. Meanwhile Enji, who did incredibly well in all of her AP and IB classes last year, earned a scholarship to James Madison University. She'll be heading off to Harrisonburg in the fall, confident that her mom is in good hands.

The family had no choice but to pull from their daughter's small college fund to pay for consults and biopsies. Enji accompanied her mom on appointments, helping her understand her tests and options. Enji's initial fear was true – her mom had breast cancer. As they were trying to figure out how to pay for the surgery she needed, Enji learned about AFC on the internet. The complicated path they'd been on was about to shift.

Enji and Galai completed the Komen Race for the Cure together this year, along with over 50 other AFC breast cancer survivors, family members and staff. As mom and daughter stood there surrounded by thousands of survivors and loved ones, Enji's mind circled back to a year ago when it all began: to when she sat in a room with her mom, a nurse and an abnormal mammogram, the weight of all that responsibility squarely on her shoulders.

The Clinic was the first place that welcomed us in when we'd been rejected everywhere else. Everyone just kept saying, "We've got it now – you don't have to worry about anything anymore."

AFC had the opportunity to lift some of that responsibility. "We've got it now – you don't have to worry about anything anymore."



Celebrating 20 Years

continued from page 1 »

a 3-hour clinic session one night per week. This included identifying and scheduling volunteers, creating patient records and ordering medical supplies. Twelve patients came to our very first clinic on a cold Tuesday night in January 1994. And as an early indicator of the generosity of the community, twice as many volunteers were there ready to care for them.

Also included among the early steering committees were Jane Barlow, community volunteer; Doris Beech, Interfaith Council; Dr. Claire Fitzpatrick, Pediatrician with Arlington County Public Schools; John Eckhard, RPh, Presens Pharmacy; John D. Kilday, CPA; Kathleen B. Koch, Arlington County Medical Society Alliance; Carol Morris, RN, Arlington Hospital; Nancy Sanger, Bulletin; Cheryl Parella, Arlington County Department of Human Services; Judith Postinger, RN, Arlington Hospital; Beverly Shaw, Executive Director of the Arlington County Medical Society; and Dr. Stephen L. Steeby, former Chief of Staff of Arlington Hospital. ♥



[A REPORT FROM OUR MEDICAL DIRECTOR]

Joan Bowes Ritter, MD

Arlington Free Clinic continues to forge ties with resources in the community to provide the best care for our patients. One example of this initiative is our relationship with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland. Our patients are seen in a variety of departments at NIH at no cost to them. The clinics that most often see our patients are Gastroenterology/Hepatology (diseases of the intestinal tract and liver) and Infectious Diseases. AFC's Director of Clinical Services, Sheila Ryan, and I recently met with these clinics to share ideas about strengthening our relationship and making it easier for our patients to access care at NIH.

Although parasitic diseases are fairly uncommon in the U.S., many of our patients come from countries where

infection with parasites is quite common. It would be prohibitively expensive and difficult to test and treat all of our patients who are at risk for these diseases. Over the past few years we have referred 74 patients to NIH's Infectious Diseases Clinic, with over half being diagnosed with a parasitic disease. Through our relationship with NIH, many of our patients have received definitive treatment from clinicians who are very experienced with diseases most physicians have only read about. In addition, the NIH Gastroenterology/Hepatology Clinic has seen 40 Arlington Free Clinic patients in the past year for evaluation and treatment of viral hepatitis, fatty liver disease and unexplained abdominal pain.

By establishing and nurturing our effective relationship with NIH, AFC

provides comprehensive patient-centered, coordinated care at a minimum cost to the community. Our clinical staff maintains close communication with NIH to ensure coordination of care. ♥



[ACA UPDATE]

We've all been hearing a lot about the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the news recently. The law is bringing access to health care to some of our nation's 47M uninsured. And since Arlington Free Clinic serves low-income, uninsured Arlingtonians, it raises the question: How does the ACA impact the Clinic?

AFC's commitment to serving those who wouldn't otherwise be able to receive quality, comprehensive medical care remains unchanged. We're delighted that some of our patients (about 5%) became insured during the Marketplace's initial open enrollment period that ended in March. We estimate that as many as 300 additional patients may be eligible to buy insurance through the Marketplace. AFC will resume efforts to provide information and guidance to this group of potentially eligible patients in advance of the next enrollment period that will begin in November. But the majority of our patients are not affected by the ACA. Here's why:

- Medicaid expansion: Virginia is one of 24 states that have not expanded Medicaid, leaving our poorest residents with no new options for health care.
- Affordability: some low-income patients who are eligible to purchase coverage via the Health Insurance Marketplace may not be able to afford the deductibles and copays of appropriate plans, even with subsidies.



Mercedes and Miguel Benitez, AFC's first patients to enroll in health care plans through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

- Complexity: most of our patients face language and/or literacy barriers which can make it very difficult to understand and navigate the often complex path to becoming insured.
- Legal status: the ACA doesn't offer coverage to people who are undocumented, and it doesn't apply to legal residents (e.g. green card holders) until they've been in the U.S. for five years.

The reality is that the ACA doesn't provide everyone access to medical care. And even if everyone who's eligible does sign up for coverage, there will still be thousands of low-income, uninsured Arlingtonians. Clearly, our community needs AFC to continue providing life saving care. That's what we will continue to do. ♥



Mark your calendars! 10.18.14

[WHY I VOLUNTEER]

By Eugene K. Soh, M.D., F.A.C.C.



I am writing from a dusty tent in northern Afghanistan where I am deployed as a physician in the U.S. Army. When not deployed, I work as an interventional cardiologist at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. I derive great satisfaction in serving a unique population of patients — active duty military members, retirees and family

members. Volunteering at Arlington Free Clinic is a similarly gratifying experience. The patients I see at AFC are universally grateful for the services we provide. I have also been struck by the burden of cardiac disease among our patients. On any given evening, I have seen patients who are just a few days removed from coronary artery bypass surgery, implantation of a defibrillator, or a prolonged hospitalization for severe heart failure.

In the course of my 22 year military career, we have moved multiple times. We have always tried to make our duty assignments our "home" for the years we live there, but shortly after moving to Arlington for the first time in 1998, my wife and I knew this was a community where we wanted to put down permanent roots. I started volunteering in about 2008 while completing my medical training in DC. Immediately, I was impressed with



the Clinic's mission, organization and the quality of care that is delivered. We are now on our third tour back to the area, and shortly after moving back to our North Arlington home in August 2013, I resumed volunteering at AFC.

The patients I see at AFC are members of our community. They are laborers, restaurant workers and stay-at-home parents. In addition to having financial stress, they are often saddled with chronic medical problems — an unfortunate double whammy in our society. However small, I hope that my contribution to their cardiac health will relieve some of the mental and physical burdens on their hearts. Smiles, hugs, and gestures of thanks in several different languages lead me to believe that I am making a difference. I often see patients at AFC after a long day of procedures and seeing patients at Walter Reed. Admittedly, sometimes I wish I could head directly home to dinner with the family. But because of the incredible staff, gracious patients and breadth of heart disease that I see, I always leave the Clinic with a smile on my face and an extra bounce in my step.

It is not only the hearts of the patients that are uplifted by our encounters. ♥

Join new and longtime donors, volunteers and partners at the National Building Museum — a special new venue for our milestone year! Guests will enjoy a fantastic evening including an elegant dinner, dancing to the music of Big Ray and the Kool Kats, fabulous silent and live auctions — as well as some fun, new surprises.

The revenue generated from this evening is an important investment in Clinic operations and the health of our community. Your support and generosity make it all possible.

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Raffle Ticket Order Form

Raffle Tickets can be purchased online at www.arlingtonfreeclinic.org. Click "Trip Raffle" on the right. Or, fill in the information below and return to AFC in the enclosed envelope.

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Number of tickets _____ @ \$100 per ticket.

Optional: join our +20 Percent Circle by donating an extra 20% in honor of our 20th Anniversary

Total \$ _____ + 20% = \$ _____

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