



Table of Contents

May 2009

Dr. Bittner Steps Down	Cover	Health Tip	Page 3
A Fond Farewell, Sister Anne!	Cover	About CHP	Page 4
What's Inside	Cover	Free Clinic Statistics	Page 4
A Patient's Story	Page 2	How You Can Help	Page 4
Spotlight on Brian Dolan	Page 2	Want to Volunteer?	Page 4

Dr. Bittner Steps Down from Role as Free Clinic Co-Medical Director

By STEPHANIE JORDAN-THOMPSON



Since the opening of the Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic (Free Clinic) more than three years ago, Dr. Cordon Bittner has provided his counsel, time, and medical expertise. Serving the community is nothing new to Dr. Bittner.

After finishing his medical training, Dr. Bittner came to Longview in 1978 at a time when two hospitals were operating. He began his work as one of four doctors in a small private practice, Family Physicians Inc. When the practice sold to St. John Medical Center in the 1990s, Dr. Bittner transitioned to work for St. John as well.

For an impressive 17 years, Dr. Bittner worked as a Family Doctor doing obstetrics and has since continued as a full time Family Physician.

When the Free Clinic began its formation, Dr. Bittner, a Peace Health doctor, was asked to become a Medical Director along with Dr. Tom Hickey, a Kaiser doctor. With two of the region's clinics represented in the Medical Directorship, Dr. Bittner believes the program does a commendable job of "more broadly representing the whole community." When the planning was completed and the implementation of the Free Clinic was ready to begin, Dr. Bittner had not considered the

possibility of volunteering with the Free Clinic, and had not expected the invitation to join the Free Clinic as a Co-Medical Director. "I really appreciated being asked," Dr. Bittner said.

"I remember at the time I was feeling a little overwhelmed in the medical practice and had concerns as to whether I would be able to give adequate time to the program," Dr. (See Dr. Bittner on page 3)

What's Inside...



Read about Brian's volunteer story on Page 2.

Did You Know?

In 3.5 years of operation, the monetary value of donated time to the Free Clinic is \$396,986.00. This does not include space costs, materials, or donated specialized care. Also during this period there were 3,601 visits by patients to the Free Clinic.



A Fond Farewell, Sister Anne!

Many may already know that Sister Anne Hayes has left our community. She was one of five nuns chosen to lead the merging of the three provinces which make up the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, the sponsors of PeaceHealth and other health care programs, hospitals and other charitable organizations across the US and United Kingdom.

With nearly 40 years of devoted service to area residents, Sister Anne leaves a legacy of programs and projects that will continue to positively impact our community. In addition to her work at PeaceHealth, she was a founding Free Clinic planning group member and instrumental in the development of the Free Clinic. For the last two years, Sister Anne has served as CHP Board Chair.

Sister Anne, you are missed. You may be gone, but never forgotten! We wish you well with your new endeavors and we look forward to seeing you again when your work brings you back to Cowlitz County.

Ken

Ken Terhaar
Interim CHP Board Chair

Note: We are happy to announce that effective June 1, 2009, Rosanne Ponzetti, PeaceHealth's Vice President of Human Resources will replace Sister Anne's position on the CHP board of directors.

A Patient's Story

Meet Kevin and Nicole Heaton

"Everyone at the Free Clinic is super-friendly...they listen to what you have to say and are really helpful!"



Nicole was one of the first patients to be seen at the Free Clinic during its opening year of operations. She found out about the Free Clinic from her mother who works at PeaceHealth. She has visited the Free Clinic a number of times to receive treatment for her diabetic condition. When Nicole's husband had trouble with his knee, it made sense for Kevin to also seek medical attention at the Free Clinic.

Before visiting the Free Clinic, Nicole had been diagnosed with Type II Diabetes and given a medication prescription. However, when the medicine did not seem to help her symptoms, she went to the Free Clinic for another opinion of what may be wrong. It was determined that Nicole had been misdiagnosed. Instead of having Type II Diabetes, she had Type I Diabetes.

Nicole was placed on insulin by the Free Clinic doctor and provided diabetic testing supplies to continue to check her sugar level. In addition, Susan Wendel, community health advocate found Nicole a permanent medical home at the Cowlitz Family Health Center. Susan gave her test strips and insulin. Nicole currently maintains a sugar count near 120 and is feeling much better.

About four weeks ago, Kevin had a problem with one of his knees and sought help at the Free Clinic. The doctor ordered x-rays and nothing was found. Kevin's knee continued to hurt so he went back to the Free Clinic and the doctor ordered an MRI. The MRI found a torn meniscus and outpatient surgery was scheduled at the In-Motion Clinic at PeaceHealth.

Susan helped Kevin and Nicole apply for the Washington State Basic Health Plan; however they were declined because the plan is not currently accepting new patients. So, Susan helped Kevin find Bridge Assistance through St. John Medical Center for his surgery.

Asked if they would recommend family and friends to the Free Clinic, they replied, "Absolutely! Everyone is super-friendly at the clinic. They listen to what you have to say and are really helpful." Kevin added, "I felt right at home at the Free Clinic and know that I can call Susan anytime if I have a question or concern."

Spotlight on Brian Dolan

A Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic Volunteer

"For me, it's an extension of the hospital's mission to care for the community."



Brian began volunteering at the Free Clinic within a month of its opening, marking this year as his fourth year of service. He routinely volunteers as a Free Clinic triage nurse every other week.

As a triage nurse, Brian interviews clinic patients, assessing their medical needs to determine how the clinic can help them. Sometimes it's determined that patients need to be seen else-

where. Brian begins by assessing if the Clinic can see the patient or they should be sent to the Emergency Department (ED) at St. John Medical Center. People come to the Clinic because they are afraid the ED will be expensive and they don't have insurance.

Born and raised in Kelso, Brian has been a critical care nurse at St. John for nearly 21 years. He sees a lot of patients in his daily work that may not have been so ill had they addressed a chronic condition, such as diabetes. If such a disease had been prevented or controlled, perhaps the patient would not be in his critical care unit.

Brian thinks the Free Clinic is a wonderful opportunity for the community. It represents community collaboration between many different health care organizations. "There is no division between people from different organizations," says Brian. "We are all working together for the benefit of the community."

Brian would like to see more nurses in the local area volunteering at the Free Clinic. "It's an opportunity to give back to the community. Everyone knows someone without insurance," he says. "For me, it's an extension of the hospital's mission to care for the community. I am blessed with a good income so why not give back?"

Thanks for Your Support!

The following donations and grants were received for Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic operations during the period from November 1, 2008 through April 30, 2009. The list is arranged in alphabetical order. We have worked to ensure the accuracy of this list. We apologize if we have inadvertently misspelled or omitted any name. Please call us at 360-423-8704 if we are in error so that we can make the appropriate adjustments.

Private Donations and Grants

Bernie & Marcia Altman
Daniel & Mary Carter
Bob & Margaret Elliott
Jack Field
Dr. Mario Forte & Kristine Keough

JH Kelly
Wendell & Mickey Kirkpatrick
Dr. Mark & Pilar Kleinman
Hilda Lethe
Longview United Methodist Church Women

Margret Nigro Living Trust
Oregon Community Foundation
F.W. & Ruby Palin
William & Virginia Paul
Regence Employees

St. Paul's Lutheran Church Enduring
Gifts Fund

Dr. Bittner *(continued from page 1)*

Bittner recalled. Even with his hesitations, Dr. Bittner took on the role of Co-Medical Director. His contributions have ranged from a monthly meeting with the Free Clinic staff, chart reviewing of Free Clinic patients, answering clinical questions, filling prescriptions and fielding test results as well as volunteering at the clinic.

Several times, Dr. Bittner referred to the sense of mission the volunteers at the Free Clinic have. He said “I admire the people at the Free Clinic for their intensity in purpose and dedication, as well as their high integrity.” Dr. Bittner encourages others to volunteer, saying “It’s fun! It’s a wonderful way to give back to the community, and the people who work there are like a family.” He believes it is important for those in the medical world to be aware of what is going on in the community, since he knows that it is “easy to lose sight of people who can’t get care.”

Along with the volunteers, the Cowlitz Family Health Center, Free Clinic Advisory Committee, Community Health Partners, many other individuals and agencies work to make the Free Clinic what it has become today. “It’s almost on auto-pilot with so many people help-

ing to organize the Free Clinic. It is very well-run, with many caring people,” said Dr. Bittner.

After four and a half years of serving the Free Clinic as a Co-Medical Director, the time has come for his retirement from the position. He will continue as a full-time Team A Family Doctor with PeaceHealth Medical Group. Rest assured, Dr. Bittner still intends to periodically volunteer at the Free Clinic.

Dr. Bittner hopes that bringing in a new Co-Medical Director to the Free Clinic will help to cultivate new ideas and further strengthen the program. “I feel like it is time to let someone else take over. It’s a position that should be rotated every so often so that other healthcare providers can see what goes on behind the scenes.”

Overall, Dr. Bittner thinks “the goal of the Free Clinic should be to put itself out of business.” He hopes for the eventual creation of an adequate health care system, so that the Free Clinic is no longer needed and every person in the community can be equally served without question.

Health Tip – Mother Knows Best!

Linda Taylor, Free Clinic Manager



The virtues of good oral health have been ingrained in us since early childhood. Our mothers often taught us that regular brushing and flossing are the best way to remove bacterial plaque, the main culprit of dental cavities and gum disease.

In spite of this knowledge, many still do not include brushing and flossing in their daily routine. What many do not know is how these same bacteria may affect general health.

Recent studies have shown that dental bacteria can produce toxins, which can enter the circulation. Once in the circulation, these toxins have been associated with many serious health risks including stroke, coronary heart disease, pneumonia, bronchitis, premature delivery and low birth weight infants.

Regular and thorough oral care is understandably more important than originally thought. The good news is that good oral health does not have to be difficult to achieve. The new oral healthcare aids, including electric and ultrasonic toothbrushes as well as irrigators, have made plaque removal more efficient and effective.

Special tools, however, are not always necessary to achieve and maintain health. Our old stand-by, simple brushing and flossing are sufficient for most. Just like Mom said, taking care of your teeth on a daily basis, visiting a dentist and dental hygienist regularly, and eating a healthy balanced diet will help you maintain not only an attractive smile, but also your health.

Look Who’s Volunteering!

New volunteers since our last publication date, November 2008:

Toby Aubol
Dr. Sholeh Bagheri
Pat Bartley
Betty Bierman

Cheryl Connell
Mary Crow
Bob Fletcher
Dr. George Fortner

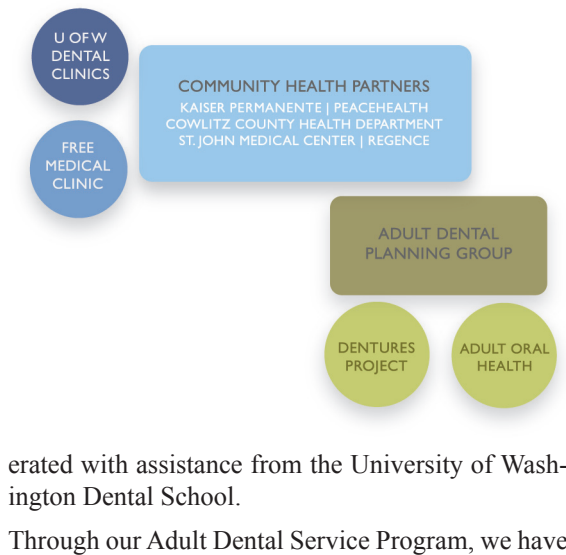
Travis Gaskill
Lastenia Gregg
Stacey Gregory
Dr. Christine Katterhagen

Janet Li
Dr. Laurie Morrison

About Community Health Partners

Community Health Partners (CHP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose primary mission is to understand and serve the health and wellness needs of the medically under-served that live or work in the region. The members of CHP include community volunteers and representatives from key health care and health insurance providers including Cowlitz County Health Department, PeaceHealth, Regence, Kaiser Permanente and St. John Medical Center.

In addition to the Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic, CHP projects include adult dental services for low-income uninsured individuals and Medicaid eligible child and parent dental clinics. The clinics are op-



been pleased to offer denturist services to 37 working-age adults in our community, through grants from the Health Care Foundation, Kaiser Permanente and FISH. As a result of receiving dentures, many of these individuals have been able to secure employment.

Current CHP board of directors:

- Sr. Anne Hayes, PeaceHealth
- Chuck Polacek, Regence
- Kathryn Robbins, Community Member
- Ken Terhaar, Community Member
- Lesley Bombardier, Community Member
- Karen Carter, Kaiser Permanente
- Carlos Carreon, Cowlitz County Health Department

Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic Statistics

(for the period November 1, 2008 through April 30, 2009)

Free Clinic Service	Number of Referrals
Basic Health Application Assistance	83
Prescription Assistance	85
Referral to Primary Care Provider	235
Referral to Specialty Care	66
Referral to Imaging	55
Referral to Dental Care	63
Referral to Vision Care	11
Referral to Bridge Assistance	28
Referral to Other Resources ¹	571
Total	1,197

1. Other Resources include referrals to community organizations for basic services, such as food and clothing as well as referrals to DSHS services, such as DSHSKids medical program, GAU program, food stamps, TANF, and maternity program.



Susan Wendel, community health advocate, is ready to help Free Clinic patients with referrals to primary and specialty care, prescription assistance and medical insurance applications.

How You Can Help

You can make a difference and allow us to continue our work by making a tax-deductible charitable donation to support the Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic or other programs supported by Community Health Partners. Please contact Paul Youmans, CHP Coordinator, at (360) 423-8704, or simply send your contribution to:

Community Health Partners
P.O. Box 2853
Longview, WA 98632

We appreciate your support! Your gift will help provide resources for the future health of Cowlitz County residents.

Want to Volunteer?

The Cowlitz Free Medical Clinic is open every Wednesday from 5:30 pm to 9:00 pm and located at 1405 Delaware Street (PeaceHealth Workplace Wellness Clinic) in Longview, Washington.

We need volunteer physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, CNAs, CMAs and medical lab technicians who have current licenses and are actively practicing. We also need people with clerical skills to staff the front desk and help patients with paperwork and have positions for greeters, interpreters, clinic assistants. If you would like to volunteer, please contact our volunteer coordinator, Susan Wendel, at (360) 501-1205.

Visit us at:

<http://www.cowlitzfreeclinic.org>



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