

## Grant Outcomes Report

### The Medical Altruism Project

#### The Problem:

The National Association of Free Clinics estimates that there are more than 1,200 free clinics in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Free clinics use volunteer physicians, nurses, other health practitioners, and non-medical personnel to provide free medical, dental, pharmacy, and other behavioral health services to low-income people who do not have insurance or other means to pay for care.

RotaCare, a free clinic on Long Island, relies completely on a cadre of more than 100 volunteer doctors, pharmacists, dentists, nurses, paraprofessionals, and clerical workers. RotaCare focuses on establishing long-term relationships with volunteers, which is effective in maintaining a continuity of care for its patients. These volunteers provide free health care services to about 1,800 patients each year.

However, by 2008, many of RotaCare's volunteers were aging out, and it needed to replace and augment its volunteer base. RotaCare estimated that within five years, at least 25% of its current volunteer corps would need to be replaced.

Moreover, demand for services outpaced RotaCare's capacity to provide them, and by 2008, its waiting list was growing by five people each week. Without additional volunteers, RotaCare anticipated the waiting list would continue to grow and more people would not receive necessary care.

#### Grant Activities and Outcomes:

In August 2008, NYSHHealth awarded RotaCare \$96,911 to develop and implement strategies to recruit more medical and non-medical volunteer staff. The project had two goals:

- Increase the yearly number of patients served by 400, reaching a new total of 2,200 patients each year.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://freeclinics.us/> on July 25, 2011.

#### KEY INFORMATION:

**GRANTEE**

RotaCare, Inc.

**GRANT TITLE**

The Medical Altruism Project

**DATES**

October 1, 2008 – May 27, 2010

**GRANT AMOUNT**

\$96,911

**FUNDING**

2007 Special Opportunities

- Create an ongoing recruitment strategy and process to ensure a steady supply of volunteers for the future.

To achieve these goals, RotaCare hired a volunteer manager who engaged volunteers, board members, and the staff of Long Island hospitals, medical societies, and other community organizations through a multifaceted outreach and educational strategy.

By March 2010, RotaCare had:

- Recruited 54 new volunteers: 31 non-medical volunteers (reception, prescription assistance, front desk, and translators); 18 nurses; 3 pharmacy personnel; and 2 physicians. This surpassed the goal of recruiting 43 volunteers.
- Surveyed volunteers to ascertain their perspectives on the characteristics of an effective volunteer and their motivations for volunteering.
- Launched a comprehensive website to feature services available at the clinic and volunteering opportunities.
- Developed a RotaCare messaging strategy for the website, brochures, and other outreach materials. RotaCare worked with Spitfire Communications, a consulting firm in Washington DC, to design the strategy.
- Developed a Speakers Bureau and trained volunteers and board members to speak about the program. Approximately 300 community members attended more than 10 of these presentations to learn about volunteer opportunities.
- Established a Department of Volunteer Recruitment that created applications for medical and non-medical volunteers, prepared recruitment advertisements, and created a database of contacts.
- Begun reducing the waiting list by accepting 25–30 new patients per month.

Of the various outreach efforts, the most effective recruitment methods proved to be working with nursing associations and local Rotary Clubs, as well as newsletters. RotaCare found that the best way to recruit physicians is through personal contacts, especially if it is through another physician. Although RotaCare reached out to medical societies and specialist physicians, there was a low interest or response rate. Some reasons for the low interest rate include the lack of attention to the provision of care for the underinsured and uninsured, controversies surrounding providing care to undocumented people, and fear of malpractice suits (although RotaCare pays for malpractice insurance for physicians who volunteer).

## The Future:

Work on the database, advertisements, and volunteer orientation material continued after the NYSHealth grant ended. RotaCare has retained the volunteer manager through a grant from the Long Island Community Foundation.

In 2010, RotaCare received a \$50,000 NYSHealth grant to implement a quality assurance program. This will allow RotaCare to apply for Federal medical malpractice coverage and help recruit more volunteer physicians.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

### ABOUT THE GRANTEE

Founded in 1992, RotaCare is the only free open door facility on Long Island that continually offers primary medical services to indigent residents. It is open two days a week. Since its inception, RotaCare has provided more than \$18 million worth of free services in concert with hospital partners, such as Mercy Medical Center and St. Francis Hospital, and pharmaceutical companies to provide free medical services and medication. RotaCare is staffed solely by volunteers, including physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dieticians, social workers, and translators, who care for approximately 1,800 indigent patients with a yearly total of 3,900 visits to the facility.

### GRANTEE CONTACT

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### NYSHEALTH CONTACT

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