

Establishing a Student-Run Free Clinic for Refugees

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There are over 26 million refugees in the world, and about 4,000 of them reside in Hillsborough County. After an arduous and uncertain journey of being accepted to the U.S. and traveling here, these refugees are only given a maximum of 8 months of Medicaid. To assess the community need for refugee healthcare, I met with stakeholders engaged in refugee services and discovered that no free or discounted healthcare was being offered, creating a dire medical need. I met with faculty members at the University of South Florida to see how we could satisfy this need, and this is when we began to develop a free clinic that would be run by volunteering medical students and physicians. The first step was to work with community medical providers to secure a clinic to use. The next step required developing various student roles, including scheduling, coordinating supplies, checking patients in, following up, and providing translation services. All of these roles required extensively training students and providers so they could be well-equipped to work with this particular demographic. The clinic also necessitates working regularly with other providers of refugee services in the community to coordinate referrals and multidimensional care. We now serve refugees at our monthly clinic from multiple countries, including Syria, Iraq, Venezuela, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we work with students and providers from several disciplines, including pharmacy and psychology. Student-run free clinics are an integral part of healthcare in the community, as they provide a way for the uninsured to receive quality healthcare without the burden of out-of-pocket fees. My goal is to outline how and why this clinic was built in order to help other free, student-run clinics develop and grow to be more efficient.