

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES of Union County, Inc. (CHSUC)

Free Medical Clinic

Based in Monroe, CHSUC began in 1982, when a group of dedicated women from Union County realized there was a great need for diabetes education as area physicians could not devote the time needed for this service during an office visit. A needs assessment was completed, Union County Diabetes Counseling Service was born, and a diabetes educator began work. Over the next two decades, services expanded as outreach began in multiple areas of Union County to locate undiagnosed adult diabetics and pre-diabetics. Diabetes educators and registered nurses conducted community screening

clinics and provided education on lifestyle changes to help those individuals control diabetes or prevent pre-diabetics from progressing to diabetes. The year 2022 will mark the 40th anniversary of the progression from a diabetes counseling service to Community Health Services of Union County, Inc. (CHSUC) Free Medical Clinic, providing a full-time, full-service medical home for low-income, uninsured adults in Union and Anson counties.

Upon the appointment of Cindy Cole, RN as Executive Director in 2006, she determined that another component, "medical care," was vital in order to extend the reach. Healthcare providers are



needed to prescribe diabetic medication and many diabetics coming in for education could not afford the cost of an office visit. In July 2010, with the support of the Board of Directors, CHSUC Diabetes Free Clinic became a reality, beginning with two exam rooms. Two founding volunteer physicians, Dr. Gwen Perkins and Dr. Roy Blank, with assistance from nurses volunteering their time, began seeing diabetic patients one evening a month. The Free Clinic soon grew to 10 volunteer healthcare providers and services continued to expand. Diabetic patients, without insurance, now had a healthcare option – a primary care provider, access to preventive education, lab tests, and diabetic supplies.

In 2017, CHSUC was one of three clinics in the U.S. to be awarded the Heart-to-Heart International, multi-year, Point-of-Care Laboratory Grant, offering up-to-the-minute lab test results and decreasing the number of patient callbacks. In September 2017, through a partnership with Wingate University, a Physician Assistant (PA) began working in the Free Clinic full-time, Monday – Thursday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm. Because of this partnership, the clinic began seeing chronic and acute care patients and became a rotation site for Wingate University Physician Assistant students, as well as students in RN (BSN), Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, and Spanish Medical Terminology programs. Southeastern College Medical Assisting interns also perform clinical rotations. In July 2020, a second PA joined the Free Clinic with funding from a generous donor. Executive Director Cindy Cole, RN, Jennifer Campbell, PA, Rebekah Mathis, PA, Dr. Dimitrios Hondros, and Dr. Gwen Perkins, Supervising Physicians, and a full staff operate the clinic. CHSUC offers education to a large diabetic population to gain control of their blood glucose; the clinic also assists hypertensive

patients to lower blood pressure, provides smoking cessation assistance, and is reducing emergency department visits by 51%. By providing a medical home, treating chronic diseases, and providing follow-up care, the result is a healthier patient population. Weekly and monthly visits to monitor progress helps the patient reach their health goals. The clinic sees a diverse patient population and provides culturally appropriate medical care and education with assistance from interpreters.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the clinic remained open on a modified schedule to meet the needs of uninsured patients. CHSUC assisted 2,085 individual patients with 9,808 visits in the midst of the crisis. CHSUC learned that life is short, and some things are out of our control, but communities can and will come together in times of crisis to meet the needs of those less fortunate.

CHSUC learned that a little "seed-like faith" can far overshadow fear. COVID quickly became the greatest challenge ever for most healthcare workers who may have wanted to, but never gave up. The devastating effects of the virus brought our worst nightmares to life as it grew, evolved, and spread quickly through our community, across our nation, and around the world.

Nearly 16 months after the start of the pandemic, the unemployment rate has resulted in residents continuing to seek

healthcare in free clinics. Without access to CHSUC Free Clinic, uninsured patients would be without primary healthcare, monthly medications, lab testing, glucose testing supplies, and diabetic education. CHSUC would tell others that free and charitable clinics have become a necessity for all communities and have received the attention of legislators as we "stood up and showed up" against COVID, for the uninsured in our communities. CHSUC is an accredited member of the NC Association of Free & Charitable Clinics, and a Top Performer award winner for Diabetes & Hypertension outcomes. The agency is a voting member of the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, holds the **2021 Gold Rating from the NAFC Quality Standards Program**, and is a BBB accredited charity seal holder.

Community Health Services of Union County, Inc. (CHSUC) is committed to making a change in the lives of our underserved population and continues to serve those in need of healthcare options. Director Cole's favorite saying is, "we are making a difference one person at a time."



CHSUC is located at 1338 East Sunset Drive, Suite C, Monroe, NC 28112. Interested in giving your time, talents or volunteering at the clinic, call 704-296-0909 for information or visit the website: www.chsuc.org.

