

@ Health & Well-Being ISSUE

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FOCUS: HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Rising Prescription Costs



With the emergence of managed care programs, many cost controls have been instituted to reduce the costs of health care services. These controls, however, have failed to address the rising costs of prescription medication. Even with a slowing in the rise of health care premiums in the last few years, the cost of prescription drug benefits have continued to increase dramatically. Although more and more Americans today have access to health care services, many are unable to afford the medications prescribed by physicians to treat their sickness or disease. "People can come here to Charity Hospital and receive free medical services, but most of the patients cannot afford the medications prescribed," according to James Burch, a social services counselor at Huey P. Long Charity Hospital. This dilemma has not limited itself to those on welfare or other public assistance programs, but greatly impacts those working class people who are uninsured or under-insured.

New and exciting discoveries are made each day in the fields of science and medicine. Among these discoveries are new drug treatments and therapies effective in treating a wide array of illnesses and diseases. However, the increasing cost of prescription drugs often places these treatments beyond reach for those they are intended to help. Prescription drugs "are as important today as a hospital bed," states Senator John Breaux of Louisiana. With a growing aging population, the need for efficient pharmacy assistance programs is evident. Too often, seniors and other needy residents must choose between buying food or buying the prescription drugs that their doctors prescribe.

Americans spend more than \$21 billion a year on prescription medicines. Those Americans suffering from chronic disease often spend thousands of dollars each year on medical prescriptions for diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. Diabetic patients require more than twice as many prescriptions as non-diabetic subjects, mainly due to diabetes treatment and to diabetes-related morbidity (cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders, and diabetic complications). To purchase drugs for extended care often requires people to create a huge debt in order to receive the treatments that would save their lives or improve their quality of life. As an example, studies show that elderly patients prescribed lipid-lowering agents to provide protection against heart attack and stroke do not refill their prescriptions as often as needed.

Foundation Funding Addresses Needs

The Rapides Foundation has recognized the need for medication assistance in the Central Louisiana area and has funded programs that aim to alleviate this need. Many local residents need greater access to medications that cure their diseases or, at least, improve their quality of life.

This edition of our newsletter features three funded programs which share a common goal - to provide prescription medication assistance to those less fortunate.

Medication Assistance Program at Huey P. Long Charity Hospital

Collaborative Wellness

By Robert Swayzer, III

Mary knows the importance of following doctor's orders and taking medication. A nurse's aide employed at Huey P. Long Charity Hospital, she encounters illness and disease on a daily basis. A mother of three, her small salary is the sole support for her and her children. A few years ago, medical retirement (at far below her regular earnings) seemed her only option. She was suffering from constant fatigue due to lack of medication, or the need to stretch her medication. "This made it almost impossible for me to complete my work assignments," she states.

Recent studies have shown that 30% of older adults cannot afford prescription drugs, and some of them will turn to unhealthy practices to keep medical costs down, according to East Carolina University researchers. A local project funded by the Rapides Foundation attempts to address this problem by providing emergency intervention to patients prescribed medication, but who would otherwise be unable to afford the costs of filling these prescriptions.

The Medication Assistance Program at Huey P. Long Charity Hospital has been in existence for seven years. The program began in 1991 with a \$500 grant from local physician Dr. Melanie McKnight. Since its beginnings, the program has 1) reduced recidivism and increased clinic compliance (especially in diabetic and asthmatic patients); 2) reduced amputations and ulcerations; and 3) reduced cardiovascular accidents (stroke), congestive heart failure, heart



Huey P. Long Med. Assistance Program staff members Gwen Cobb, James Burch, and Anna Basco (Auxiliary President).

attacks, and kidney failure among cardiac patients. For Mary, this program has been a lifesaver. "With aid from the program, I received immediate medication and was enrolled with several manufacturers. Most importantly, my energy level and stamina are greatly improved."

The Medication Assistance Program attempts to coordinate area resources through the

Recent studies have shown that thirty percent of older adults cannot afford prescription drugs.

development of partnerships with other organizations in the area addressing this need. It has developed working relationships with the Shepherd Center, a local organization providing free pharmacy services to approximately 40 individuals each week, and has arranged discounted drug costs with a local pharmacy. These collaborative relationships allow for the

coordination or sharing of costs. Patients are first referred to the Shepherd Center. Those who are not provided assistance through the Shepherd Center may receive assistance through the Medication Assistance Program. Presently, the program is funded through small cash revenues from the hospital's gift shop, annual fund raising efforts, and grants such as the one provided by the Rapides Foundation.

Social services counselor Jim Burch states "Because of the Rapides Foundation, our program has been able to provide many patients with medication who otherwise would not be able to afford it." According to Burch, much of the funding goes toward providing medication for cardiac and diabetic patients, for those suffering from hypertension and asthma, and for providing a large number of antibiotics. In addition, samples provided by pharmaceutical companies reduce the costs of the program. To be eligible for services, patients must:

- Be ineligible for any insured plan providing pharmacy assistance,
- Pass a financial screening indicating inability to purchase medications, and
- If possible, contribute partially towards their needs.

Patients are issued vouchers for medication at a local pharmacy and when possible, may be asked to pay a portion of the reduced costs.

Burch hopes that in the future, other patient needs such as diabetic footwear, eyeglasses, dental aids, and services for the elderly can be provided. The Foundation salutes the Medication Assistance Program at Huey P. Long Charity Hospital as an example of people working together for a healthier community.



The Caring Peoples' Free Pharmacy

By Robert Swayzer, III

Last Resort

At seventy-one, Gracie is plagued with high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems. She spends more than \$250 of her \$487 social security income on prescription drugs.

Many times, Gracie cannot afford to fill all of her prescriptions each month. Like many elderly people, Gracie relies on prescription drugs to treat the variety of ailments that come with old age. Yet Medicare, the government health insurance program for nearly 40 million elderly and disabled Americans, doesn't pay for outpatient prescription drugs.

Stories like the one above are all too familiar to Denise Evans. Evans, executive director of the Caring People's Free Pharmacy, begins her morning by listening to many of these stories as she screens patients seeking medication assistance. With its humble beginnings in December 1997 as the first charitable formulary in Central Louisiana, today, the Caring People's Free Pharmacy seeks to alleviate pain and suffering by providing those in need with medications

they could not otherwise afford. The Free Pharmacy, supported by The Rapides Foundation, acts as a pharmacy of last resort and a safety net for the community. Priority is assigned to the poor, the homeless, and the elderly. The primary goal of alleviating suffering and promoting dignity for the less fortunate in Central Louisiana is the force that keeps pharmacy staff and volunteers working to serve over 90 clients each week. Evans states that the organization's only regret is "Not being able to help all of those who come through the doors of the Caring People's Free Pharmacy seeking assistance. Some days, there just isn't enough medicine to go around."

The free pharmacy acts as pharmacy of last resort and a safety net for the community.

At the Alexandria location, Evans oversees a staff of twelve volunteer pharmacists and a pool of over twenty community volunteers. Clients are carefully screened for eligibility on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. They are asked to provide verification of income as well as all bills and monthly expenses. After screening and acceptance, the volunteer pharmacists then fill prescriptions for later pickup and counseling. Medications are available for the treatment of most common chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and respiratory disease. A second branch, located in Marksville, Louisiana, opened in February 1998.

For Gracie, the pharmacy has been her salvation. As her son picks up her monthly supply of prescription medication, he thanks pharmacy volunteers for "helping his mother to stay healthy." Properly taking all of her prescription medication has not only improved Gracie's quality of life, but has also reduced the number of visits that she pays to the doctor's office.



foundation **health tip**

ADVERSE REACTIONS (Side Effects)

Some drugs can cause side effects (adverse reactions). Usually these are mild — a slight rash, mild headache, nausea or drowsiness. They can, however be quite severe, such as prolonged vomiting, bleeding, marked weakness or impaired vision or hearing.

These are warning signals that the medication is creating a reaction. When a reaction is unexpected or severe, consult your physician immediately. **Always** take your medication as it has been prescribed by your physician.

The Shepherd Center



Sanctuary for the needy

By Robert Swayzer, III

The sign at 1400 Jackson Street has become a familiar icon in the lives of many of the less fortunate in Rapides Parish. To some, this place offers food and clothing; to others, rent assistance, utility assistance, and even furniture. Not only have they provided these things, but they have also provided a vital link to healthy living. President John F. Kennedy once said, "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." And that is the goal of The Shepherd Center - to help those who are less fortunate.

The Shepherd Center is a coalition of 60+ churches and synagogues in Rapides Parish providing a wide array of services to the poor and needy. Their CBNLA Prescription Fund represents a joint effort of the Shepherd Center and the Rapides Parish Medical

Alliance Auxiliary. The program is partially funded by a grant by The Rapides Foundation. The program has a unique but simple goal - to improve the health care of those in real need, prevent unnecessary hospitalizations, recidivism, and in some cases, sustain life itself. Clients of the program often include the working poor of the community whose hours have been reduced to part-time status; those who have been recently laid-off, and seasonal and temporary workers.

Clients are carefully screened and given a prescription voucher, which can then be used at Professional Pharmacy, which fills the prescriptions "at cost." A unique aspect of the program is that Faith In Action volunteers make personal visits to many of the homebound elderly and disabled. The volunteers pick-up and deliver the completed prescriptions for the clients. Shepherd Center client Nelda Soileau states, "Medication today is just too expensive. Sure, I can see a doctor for free at Charity Hospital, but you still just can't afford the medication. Sometimes I am given four or five different prescriptions."

Lil Lienhop, a volunteer for nearly five years, is often the first person to greet clients at The Shepherd Center and begin the initial screening process. Lienhop loves her work at the center and states, "Sometimes I am the receptionist and at other times I serve as an interviewer. I try to serve where needed and help in any way that I can." A paradigm of success, the outreach provided by The Shepherd Center continues to promote a healthy CENLA.



Shepherd Center Volunteer, Lil Lienhop

Grant Update:

The Rapides Foundation Grants January - March 1999

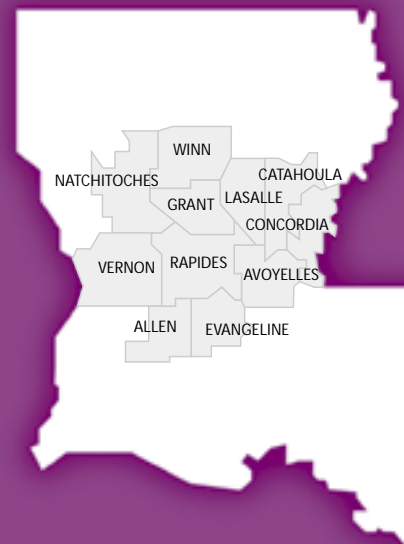
| | | |
|--|---------|---------|
| Arts and Humanities Council of Avoyelles- To sponsor artists in residence, summer arts camps and performances in addition to funding for strategic planning and program development. | 30,000 | 1 year |
| Better Business Bureau - Technology upgrade to allow access to national databank | 3,700 | 1 year |
| Catahoula Parish Hospital District #2 - Start-up and operations support for dental program at Sicily Island Community Health Center. | 500,000 | 5 years |
| Community Senior Centers - Consulting services to plan for development of senior center in South Alexandria | 10,000 | 1 year |
| Family Playhouse - Musical theater training for residents at Youth Challenge camp | 19,500 | 1 year |
| Family Playhouse - Implementation of arts in science and literature workshops in local elementary schools | 40,500 | 1 year |
| Huey P. Long Hospital Auxiliary- Medications for outpatients | 60,000 | 2 years |
| La Commission de Avoyelles - Technical assistance to further develop Big Bend museum and community center project | 10,000 | 1 year |
| LaSalle Arts Council - Matching funds to support creation of arts center and museum in Olla | 25,000 | 1 year |
| Louisiana Creole Heritage Center - Partial support of 1999 conference | 7,900 | 1 year |
| LSU Medical Center-Shreveport - Initiation of primary care health services in Jonesville | 272,995 | 18 mos. |
| Office of Public Health Region V - Initiation of nurse-led home visiting services for at-risk children ages 0-2 in Allen Parish | 250,000 | 27 mos. |
| Office of Public Health Region VI - Health services for 200 at-risk children in a daycare setting | 82,280 | 3 years |
| Office of Public Health Region VI - Nurse case management and home visitation services for non-compliant diabetics ages 45-62 | 279,475 | 3 years |
| Pediatric Therapy Center - Technical assistance to further develop and pilot early identification tools for developmentally delayed children | 8,445 | 1 year |
| Outpatient Medical Center - Organizational development for an older adult services network in Leesville | 7,000 | 1 year |
| Rapides Parish Council on Aging - Creation of an arts gallery and arts education program utilizing senior artists | 38,000 | 18 mos. |
| Rapides Senior Citizens Centers - Matching funds for development of a senior center in DeVille and implementation of a pilot health promotion program. | 115,000 | 3 years |
| READ - Technical assistance for organizational development of a literacy group in Allen Parish | 6,500 | 1 year |
| Southern Forest Heritage Museum - Matching funds for creation of an audio-visual theatre | 28,500 | 1 year |
| Southwest Area Health Education Center - Development of an aqua therapy program for Allen Parish seniors | 165,000 | 1 year |
| Task Force for Children's Arts - Specialized arts instruction for special education students at Alexandria Junior High | 5,000 | 1 year |

The Rapides Foundation is a philanthropic organization that provides grants to organizations throughout an 11 parish service area that share the foundation's mission to improve the health and well-being of Central Louisiana.



The Rapides Foundation

www.rapidesfoundation.org



New foundation website offers grant information online



Beginning in May of 1999, The Rapides Foundation's new website will be online. Located at www.rapidesfoundation.org, the site will provide comprehensive grant program information as well as workshop dates and application deadlines.

"Given the vast amount of information that must be made available to potential grantees as well as the general public, the internet is a natural medium for us to utilize," says Joe Rosier, Executive Director/CEO of The Rapides Foundation. "This site makes our foundation and programs more accessible to our 11 parish service area that stretches from Texas to Mississippi."

www.rapidesfoundation.org

Convenient Toll-Free Number

The Rapides Foundation has a new toll-free number for callers outside the Alexandria/Pineville area. "This is a major convenience for people contacting the foundation, especially those grant and technical programs requiring contact with the foundation prior to submitting an application," said Allen Smart, Program Officer for The Rapides Foundation.

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