



Rx#: The Bigger Picture

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Acceptance to the pharmacy professional division is an accomplishment that comes with many trials and tribulations. Entering orientation, your mind is filled with the thoughts of the future patients that you will help, and lives that you will impact. That initial perception may change as pharmacy school has many challenges along the way.

Internships take time, the material is extensive and rigorous, and the curriculum moves swiftly. Between hours spent at the library and time spent in class, it can be difficult not to lose sight of your original love and passion: the patients. Since the lives of our patients are dependent on the care we provide, much of the education for students in healthcare professions is earned through rigorous hands-on training. Indulging in these hands-on patient-centered experiences is extremely beneficial for those pursuing a career in healthcare and bringing back that clarity of passion. However, many experiences can vary in their level of patient interaction based on activity, patient attendance and students' willingness to engage. One of the most popular and highly anticipated patient care experiences at the University of Toledo is the Community Care Clinic Free Medical Clinic.

The Community Care Clinic (CCC) is an interprofessional student organization at the University of Toledo. The CCC has partnered with local healthcare providers to establish the Community Care Free Medical Clinic (CCFMC). The primary missions of the CCFMC are to provide free, quality health care to the underserved and to raise healthcare awareness in Toledo, Ohio. The clinic provides the opportunity for student volunteers to discover societal issues, practice principles of public health in an interprofessional team fashion, and to initiate a positive change in the Greater Toledo area. The CCFMC constantly strives to improve its impact in the community.¹ CCFMC teaches pharmacy students, and all professional students involved, that our responsibility is to treat the patient holistically, and to address patient's personal needs in our approach to their care.

The experience gained from CCFMC has become an essential aspect of our learning experience, as well as a way to integrate impactful patient experiences with our academic learning. The CCFMC was started in 2010 by Dr. Richard Paat, M.D., FACP, as a way to expand his practice to serve the underserved in the greater Toledo area. The CCFMC is a unique clinic in that it has many "branching" clinics associated with it. One in particular, Labre (La-breh) Clinic, has been extremely influential in our pharmacy education and reminds us what is truly important

about our chosen field of care. Dr. Paat developed the Labre Clinic branch a few years after the Main Clinic was established.

At its conception, Labre Clinic was not operating on the scale that it is today. It was started by Dr. Paat in order to fulfill his wish to provide volunteer medical services for a family in need of care. He followed a “physician house-call” design where he would travel to patients, rather than have the patients drive to the clinic. Dr. Paat reached out to various organizations in the Toledo area, including St. John’s Jesuit, a local high school, to find a family that he would be able to spend future years assisting. However, soon this plan expanded. Seeing the high demand for medical services in this underserved community, Dr. Paat decided to bring students along with him, forming a small traveling clinic. Soon, Dr. Paat and his students “set up shop” in two separate locations on the streets in downtown Toledo, where patients from nearby areas could easily access by walking. Today, Labre Clinic is a traveling “street” clinic that is active every Monday in downtown Toledo. A group of interprofessional students in addition to a select few providers provide free medical attention to those in need. The clinic can provide diagnosis, treatment, referrals, and education to its patients. Pharmacy students are included in this group, and assist in dispensing medications using a small traveling inventory and providing medication education to the patients. This education includes important counseling points about how to take the medication for maximum benefit and minimizing any side effects.

Labre Clinic attracts a unique group of patients. Similar to the Main Clinic, most of the patients seen in Labre Clinic are impoverished and may have varying levels of health literacy. The difference is that Labre patients are at a further disadvantage by not having means of transportation to receive healthcare, and it can be as far as a two hour walk to Main Clinic. Many of these patients are also homeless in the downtown area, or their home is dilapidated. For example, it is known that many of the families we treat at Labre lack running water, or a source of heat during the winter months. This makes it especially difficult for patients to care for themselves, let alone other members of their family.

As a pharmacy student, it is extremely moving to meet and interact with patients in this state of need. In pharmacy school, we learned about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, such as sustainable food and water sources, shelter and stability. We are taught that these are true needs, and should be a priority in order to sustain life. It can be easy to take these needs for granted, or assume that the patients we are caring for do not struggle to meet these needs. Labre Clinic became the first patient interaction where it was apparent to us that the patients we were working with needed more than healthcare alone, and that our attention should be drawn to personalized, holistic care. Although these patients come to the clinic seeking healthcare, we have to take their living situation into account at all times in order to provide holistic and humanistic care that encompasses the bigger picture. Assessing their outside needs, on top of obtaining control of their illnesses or disease states, will ultimately result in a longer sustaining impact on the patient.

The patients we see in Labre have multiple social and medical needs that must be addressed. Typically, families that we treat in Labre Clinic are living in the small, run-down

houses. Some homes are clearly due for condemnation: there are no working utilities, the second floor is caving in, there are wild animals living in the home, mold grows everywhere, and there is little protection from the harsh elements that northern Ohio can experience. Despite these poor living conditions, these families continue to live there, as they had been living there for years and are unable to supply the funds it would take to repair any damage let alone purchase a new house. These conditions potentially contribute to the health outcomes of these patients.

A recent perspective article published by the New England Journal of Medicine also emphasized the need for open, honest, personable conversation with patients and how it can benefit both the practitioner and patient.² We learned this lesson the first time that we personally attended Labre Clinic as pharmacy students. Our assumption was that we were there to treat this family's various health conditions. The typical role of the pharmacy student is to assist the medical interview team in making appropriate medication selections, as well as to ensure that the prescribed medications are available through our limited formulary. Then, this medication is counted and dispensed, along with counseling and education to the patient. This was our assumption about the standard pharmacy student procedure. However, this was only a small part of our work. The interprofessional team's work also included handing out blankets and gloves in the winter, bringing cold bottled water in the summer, and *always* asking if the family members had food to eat. If the family had no food, the clinic was able to provide food through a few different resources. St. John's Jesuit delivers food to each of the clinic locations for patients. Also, organizations such as SCAP (Students Cultivating Access to Produce) frequently donated food to be given out to patients as well. Interactions with the family always included more than just talking about their health, but also about their lives, while being able to have a personable conversation with jokes and fun. These patients are typically ignored by many, and sometimes the conversations to be had at Labre Clinic were some of the most important and meaningful social interactions the patients would have that day or even that week.

By far, working with these patients has been one of the most impactful experiences of our lives. By working with these patients, we have learned that healthcare should not be limited to what is seen on paper, but rather to what the entire picture is showing us. This means that, as pharmacists, we need to look beyond surface-level medication issues, and address patient's personal and lifestyle needs.

As students, the CCC provided us with the opportunity to practice in an interprofessional team experience. We gained far more appreciation for the various roles every individual member of a healthcare team provides. We grew comfortable speaking with providers and working closely with patients. Throughout these experiences, we have developed a variety of skills and characteristics including, but not limited to: strong communication, effective leadership and management, time management, resilience, selflessness, and working with diverse individuals to produce great results. We believe very strongly in personal accountability and integrity. Above all, we learned what it means to work in a profession as a servant leader.

As future pharmacists, our responsibilities stretch far beyond treating a patient's various disease states. Rather, our responsibility is to treat the patient holistically, and to address needs that may not necessarily correlate with numbers or labs. Labre Clinic, and CCFMC as a whole, has taught us how to integrate compassion for patients back into our treatment processes and the Pharmacist Patient Care Process.³ It is important to recognize that patients are people with far greater needs than simply those in the patient profile. As healthcare professionals, if we cannot see the bigger picture and make efforts to address patients' outside needs, then we are failing to make a lasting impact.

Our time thus far at a Labre and the CCFMC has been nothing short of memorable. Labre Clinic has taught us what it means to practice pharmacy with compassion, understanding, and humility. We have learned to form more personal bonds with our patients and other healthcare providers, and we have seen the positive results that this can yield. We firmly believe that it has helped shape the vision of what type of pharmacist we want to be for the rest of our lives as we continue to advance through our careers.

References

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