

## **FirstHealth Receives Duke Grant For Programs at Free Care Clinic**

By helping its patients successfully manage chronic disease, the Moore Free Care Clinic hopes to significantly reduce the number of repeat emergency department visits and hospital admissions among the people it serves.

Electronic medical records (EMRs) are key to achieving that goal.

A \$141,840 grant from the Duke Endowment to FirstHealth of the Carolinas will help establish chronic disease management and electronic medical record programs at the Free Care Clinic.

"The grant will support a chronic disease management clinic that will be run as a research project to try to determine if good management of chronic disease will prevent a significant number of unnecessary and uncompensated ER visits and hospital admissions by Moore Free Care Clinic patients," says Dr. David Bruton, who chairs the Moore Free Care Clinic Board. "The electronic medical record is a necessary tool to accomplish that task."

The Endowment expects to contribute another \$99,719 to the program later this year.

According to Bruton, EMRs allow privacy-protected patient data to be used to improve care and measure clinical outcomes.

"With EMRs, the Free Care Clinic can determine which treatments and interventions are most likely to prevent unnecessary, uncompensated visits to the ER and hospital," he says. "This will improve the patient's health and save society's money. Uncompensated care is not free."

The Moore Free Care Clinic has recorded more than 2,500 office visits since it opened in April 2004. To be eligible for Free Care Clinic services, a patient must be uninsured and fit federal poverty level guidelines.

According to Bruton, about 75 percent of the patients who are seen at the Free Care Clinic are employed or have a family member who is employed. "The main group we're taking care of is the uninsured working poor," he says.

Bruton attributes much of the Free Clinic's success to the generosity of the community and the support of FirstHealth of the Carolinas and its Community Health Services program. Members of the Community Health staff helped write the proposal for The Duke Endowment grant.

"FirstHealth is very, very committed to indigent care," Bruton says, "and spends a lot of money and a lot of administrative time and commitment to accomplishing that task. Obviously, the only way that can happen is if the physicians, nurses, lab technologists, pharmacists and others all work together with the hospital to create a system of excellent care for our community."

Bruton describes the Free Care Clinic as a “full-service operation,” but with many services that are provided outside its Carthage location.

“Moore Regional Hospital, for instance, provides laboratory and imaging services to our patients,” he says. “The various subspecialists who can more effectively see our patients in their offices accept our patients. We don’t have a dental chair or a dentist in the clinic, but we have a dental clinic to which we can refer patients with decayed and abscessed teeth for care. One of our stated goals is that our patients receive care as good as the care you can purchase in the community.”

FirstHealth of the Carolinas has supported the work of the Free Care Clinic in a variety of ways. In addition to the grant-writing support that led to the grant from The Duke Endowment, FirstHealth has donated challenge grants totaling \$100,000 to the clinic’s work over the past two years. Many FirstHealth employees routinely volunteer their services at the clinic.

“By working together, the Moore Free Care Clinic and FirstHealth of the Carolinas help assure the delivery of quality health care services to the most vulnerable people in our community, those who – because they are uninsured or underinsured – find it difficult to get the care they need,” says Charles T. Frock, CEO of FirstHealth of the Carolinas. “Many of our physicians contribute their time and talents to the Free Care Clinic, and so do many of our employees. FirstHealth is happy to support their work philosophically and practically as well as financially. The reason for our support is really very simple: What is good for the patients of the Free Care Clinic is good for us all.”

Bruton agrees.

“This kind of working hard to work together is actually a bit unique in our medical care system,” he says. “Very often, because of the differences and complexities in health care delivery, you find that various groups are at cross-purposes, so it’s one of the wonderful and unique things about our medical community that it is striving to work together to try to understand each other, to try to support each other. The beneficiaries, of course, are the patients in our system.”

The grant for the programs at the Moore Free Care Clinic was included in a \$35,335,000 grants package that the trustees of The Duke Endowment approved for organizations in North and South Carolina late last year.

Established in 1924 by North Carolina industrialist and philanthropist James B. Duke, The Duke Endowment serves the people of North and South Carolina by supporting selected programs of higher education, health care, children’s welfare and spiritual life.

Grants for 2005 totaled about \$125 million, a new annual record for the 81-year-old foundation. Grants made since the Endowment was founded in 1924 total more than \$2.1 billion.