EXPANDING JACKSON FREE CLINIC OUTREACH TO RURAL SITES

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INTRODUCTION

The Jackson Free Clinic (JFC) is a student-owned and student-run free clinic operated by students from the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) health professional schools. The clinic's mission is to provide high-quality health services to underserved Mississippians with an emphasis on equity, accessibility, compassion, and respect. The clinic has an existing Community Health Outreach Program that delivers blood glucose and blood pressure screenings and vaccinations at local partner sites, hosting over 90 events in 2021. Rural outreach during these events was limited to COVID-19 vaccine distribution. One aspect of equitable care that the JFC focused on for the 2022-23 term was the expansion of access to other rural health services.

Access to quality healthcare is a persistent challenge for many rural communities in the United States. Mississippi, in particular, has some of the highest rates of poverty in the country.[1] In addition, we have the lowest levels of access to healthcare in the country including the amount of uninsured Mississippians under the age of 65.[2] Furthermore, rural areas have a higher uninsured status compared to non-rural areas.[3] Over half of Mississippi's population is rural while more than half of our doctors are practicing in urban areas.[4] All but 2 counties in Mississippi are considered to be medically underserved with more than 90% having a shortage of primary care physicians.[5] This creates a large population of medically underserved residents within Mississippi's 82 counties.

In 2022, the JFC provided care in the clinic to uninsured individuals from 88 different towns and rural areas across the state. However, JFC recognizes and seeks to alleviate the burden of seeking care for these distant patients by bringing our health care services to them.

AIM

This poster describes the creation of a Rural Outreach program for the JFC, with efforts to explore the challenges and needs of rural Mississipians, and the formation of a partnership with a nearby rural health clinic for expansion of healthcare access.

The goal of this research is to improve the quality of Rural Outreach through the JFC to better meet the needs of the state's underserved populations. The data and outcomes will be used to justify expansion of rural health outreach through our clinic and associated partners. Ultimately, this poster aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to address disparities in healthcare access and ensure that all residents, regardless of where they live, have access to the care they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

METHODS

Firstly, the JFC created a Rural Community Outreach Director position, tasked with expanding the clinic's outreach efforts to unreached areas in Mississippi. Events led by this Director involved our typical outreach model of blood glucose and pressure readings and counseling along with the following improvements:

- Expansion to include physical exams, flu vaccinations, and the new COVID-19 bivalent booster
- Strengthening of our partnership with Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance and local Hispanic populations
- Advertisement of our outreach program on multiple social media platforms to establish new partnerships
- Establishment of regular events with El Pueblo of Mississippi, AJFC Community Action Agency, and Mainstreet Crystal Springs
- Creation of a gas reimbursement program to incentivize student volunteers to dedicate their time and resources to staffing these events

Second, we are in the process of implementing a survey at our rural sites to gather qualitative data on what healthcare services are lacking in rural areas and quantitative data on how long it has been since patients have received certain primary care and preventive health services.

Finally, we established a new partnership with Forest Medical Mission Clinic, who treats uninsured patients with basic medical needs for free, monthly, to provide comprehensive care to rural communities. The clinic is limited in the services and medications it can provide, so the partnership works as follows:

- Forest Baptist Medical Mission refers patients to JFC via JFC's Chief Outreach Officer for needs outside of their scope, such as referrals, lab draws, and greater medication inventory.
- Forest Baptist Medical Mission transports the referred patients to JFC.
- Forest Baptist Medical Mission provides reminders and follow-up for patients.
- JFC conducts outreach at Forest Baptist Medical Mission to draw labs for patients and provide medical and social health services, as needed.

RESULTS

In addition to on-site clinic care delivered to patients traveling from rural areas in 2022, the JFC Rural Outreach program achieved the outcomes in Table 1:

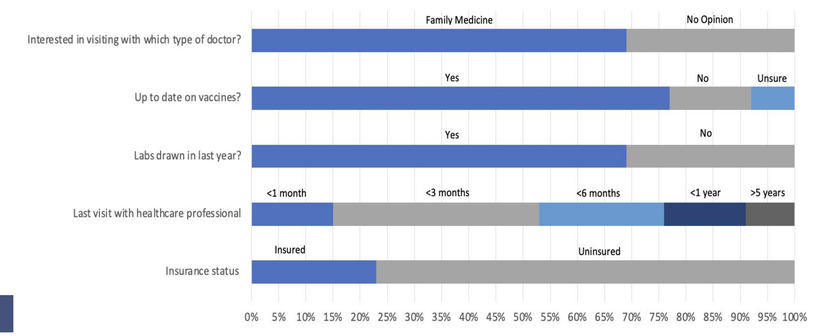
TABLE 1: RURAL OUTREACH IMPACT

Measure	Total Number
Events	22
Rural Cities	11
Patients Served	425
Vaccines Delivered	211
Gas Reimbursements	11

The Rural Health Access Survey data is in its preliminary stages. The first month of 13 responses is presented in Figure 1.

The Forest Baptist Medical Mission partnership will go into effect in February 2023. The JFC outreach team will travel to Forest to draw labs for patients.

FIGURE 1: RURAL HEALTH ACCESS SURVEY RESPONSES (preliminary)



CONCLUSION

This poster demonstrates an effective model employed by a student-run free clinic to reach rural communities who face barriers to healthcare access. The results of these efforts show that having a Rural Community Outreach Director who establishes relationships with community partners is an effective way to focus our efforts on serving rural communities. The survey conducted will further justify and improve our efforts by providing valuable insights into the needs and expectations of rural patients. Currently, not enough survey data exists to draw any conclusions.

Our partnership with Forest Baptist Medical Mission and other rural health partners will allow us to expand our outreach to include essential services such as labs, telehealth, referrals, prescription assistance, and more. By continuing to focus on the needs of rural patients, we can make a meaningful impact on their lives and improve the overall quality of healthcare in rural areas.

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