

## **Bringing aid to the uninsured: Young physician works to open free medical clinic in Auburn by spring 2006**

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by [Mike Archbold](#)

Journal Reporter

A young doctor still finishing her family medicine residency program in Seattle has put together a group of health providers with the goal of opening a free medical clinic in Auburn next spring.

It would be the third such clinic in King County, joining ones in Bellevue and Renton. Julie Stroud, 29, is a third-year resident with the Swedish Family Medicine First Hill Residency Program, and conceived the idea for a free clinic early this year. She and her husband live in Auburn.

To be called Christ Community Health Clinic, the clinic tentatively would be open for a few hours on Saturdays and offer primary medical care. When it opens, it would be among at least 32 free medical clinics that operate around the state, including the Renton and Bellevue clinics, according to Sally Neely with the Washington Health Foundation.

The exact number of free clinics and where they are located are hard to come by, she said. Most free clinics, like Stroud's, are faith-based, she said. Sometimes community clubs such as Rotary support them. They operate for a few hours one or two days a week although a clinic in Vancouver, Wash., is open five days a week. She estimates that the free clinics she is in contact with saw about 58,000 patients last year.

They usually offer primary care and referral to other agencies and medical partners in their communities.

Local hospitals help local free clinics, too, she added.

"They are a wonderful local response to a health care system that is not working," she said.

The Washington Health Foundation is a private non-profit agency that works to improve health and health care services in the state. "In this state it's part of the safety net, but a hidden part of the safety net," Neely added.

In a report issued in September, the county health department said the number of uninsured people in King County reached a record high last year: 15.5 percent, or about 190,000 people. Though rates countywide are increasing, average rates from 2002 to 2004 show that south King County has the highest rates of uninsured at 18 percent, compared to Seattle with 14 percent, north King County at 12 percent, and the Eastside with 9 percent.

The Bellevue and Renton free clinics are Rotaclinics and supported by community Rotary clubs.

Organized by Dr. William Grimes and his wife, Anne, a registered nurse, the Bellevue clinic opened in 1997 and is currently housed on the first floor of the HopeLink building at 148th and Main Street.

The Renton clinic opened two years ago in the Salvation Army building on Tobin Avenue in downtown Renton.

Both are open Saturday mornings for several hours and are staffed by volunteer physicians, nurse practitioners, physicians' assistants, nurses and other volunteers. Anne Grimes said the two clinics operate with 80 to 90 volunteer health providers and another 100 staff volunteers.

“We get a real mix of people,” she said. “Probably the most dramatic statistic is that the majority of the people coming in are working poor who have low-paying jobs. They have families and jobs that don't offer health insurance.”

Each clinic sees about eight to 24 patients each Saturday, and about 40 percent of the patients are Spanish-speaking, she said.

Grimes said both Overlake Hospital in Bellevue and Valley Medical Center in Renton provide free laboratory services to the clinics, and Valley extends free X-ray services. There also are two radiology groups in Bellevue that help out.

“It's amazing we can do so much with so little,” Anne Grimes said. The largest expense -- about \$15,000 a year -- is medications.

The state takes care of one key clinic need: malpractice insurance for volunteer physicians under its Volunteer Retired Providers Program. The program, started in 1992, pays insurance for retired health providers or practicing physicians whose malpractice insurance doesn't extend to volunteer work.

Grimes said she welcomes another free clinic in the suburbs. Her advice to Stroud's Auburn group is simple: Get strong community support and connect with the local medical community.

Stroud said she has seven health providers on board now but she is looking for 20 or more in order to spread out the volunteer hours.

An information meeting about the free clinic is planned Tuesday, Nov. 15, at 7 p.m. in the Checker's Cafe inside the cafeteria at Auburn Regional Medical Center.

The clinic doesn't yet have a home and she estimates an annual budget at about \$20,000. The plan, she said, is to open up somewhere temporarily and then move into something more permanent as need dictates.

“We want this to be seen as a community, churchwide effort,” she said. Grimes said free clinics work because of the health-care professionals who volunteer their time and effort. Besides, she said, it really is fun for doctors to practice without worrying about money or insurance billings.

“The patients who come in are so very grateful for the care,” Grimes added. “As a volunteer we feel we get more out of it than the patient.”

A member of Grace Community Church, Stroud said her plan for the Auburn clinic grew out of her desire to lead a purpose-driven life. She had read the best-selling book of that title by Rick Warren, a California pastor, which asks the question: “What are your plans to impact the community around you?”

“I'd always had a desire to serve the under-served,” Stroud said. Swedish operates a free family-care clinic and a stint at the free 45th Street Youth Clinic helped spark the idea. Auburn doesn't have a free clinic and, like most South County cities, has a larger population without medical insurance than elsewhere in the county.

“That's why I went into medicine,” she said.

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Some corrections to the article: 1) Julie and Steve live in Renton, 2) the clinic name is "Christ Community Free Clinic"