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Access Now arranges free health services in Richmond area

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A Richmond program that helps uninsured people get specialty medical care and surgeries has arranged for more than \$2 million in free physician care since it began.

"We have, in a year and a half, returned \$2.4 million in charity care to the community," said Deborah Love, executive director of the Richmond Academy of Medicine, which manages the Access Now program.

The program is a collaboration of physicians, hospitals, free clinics and others to work with low-income uninsured people who need specialized care or procedures.

Many area hospitals are obligated to provide a certain amount of free care to the community, but in the past, patients have had difficulty finding out what is available and how to access it. Also, free clinics arranging for their patients to be seen by specialists or to get imaging services often relied on the same doctors over and over again to donate their time.

Access Now provides a way to more broadly distribute the responsibility of caring for the uninsured and centralizes coordination of those efforts. The program's clients are uninsured patients who don't make a lot of money but don't qualify for government-supported health-care programs.

The \$2.4 million represents the value of the care provided by 900 doctors to more than 1,900 patients.

Working through any of 16 local free clinics that partner with Access Now, people with income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level can get free care.

Love said the services provided in the program's first 18 months include: 135 general surgeries, 191 orthopedic procedures and surgeries, 270 colon screenings, 11 cataract/ophthalmology screenings and 35 cardiovascular examinations. In addition, the program arranged for 263 women who had abnormal cervical-cancer screenings to have follow-up procedures called colposcopies.

Also, 14 women had procedures to remove potentially cancerous breast cells or tumors, Love said. Referrals to the program are made through the partner free clinics.

Patricia Klinger learned of the program from staff at a CrossOver Ministry clinic. With the program's help, she was able to have a gastrointestinal procedure she said she could not afford on her own.

"From the summer of 2008 until early this year, I had been dealing with a painful health challenge. . . . I really do not know how to thank you enough for your charitable, kind service to me," Klinger wrote in a letter to program staff.

HCA Richmond and Bon Secours have provided \$50,000 annually to support the program. In addition, the program has received grants from the Jenkins Foundation, the Virginia Health Care Foundation and the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation.

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