



Summit Community Care Clinic Medical Director Christine Hoppe, M.D. reassures a young patient at the SCCC during a physical examination.

HEALING THE BODY, MIND AND SOUL

Summit Community Care Clinic's non-profit, integrative health care model makes a difference for those in need. BY KATE LAPIDES

ASK A LOCAL IF THERE'S A DOWNSIDE TO LIFE IN MOUNTAIN paradise, and the answer usually relates to the exorbitantly high cost of housing and life in a resort town. Firefighters, construction workers, ski instructors, teachers, baristas, and nurses—all serve crucial roles in a ski town economy, but many struggle to pay the bills, including the cost of medical insurance and care. The combination of seasonal service work and numerous small-business owners equates to a local population that is medically underserved. According to Colorado County Health Rankings, Summit County has one of the healthiest populations in Colorado, but also one that struggles to afford health care: Approximately 22% of adults are uninsured.

Enter the Summit Community Care Clinic (SCCC). Sporting an acronym that sounds a bit like the superhero it is, the non-profit health care entity's mission is to offer integrated, patient-centered, low cost health care to all Summit County residents, regardless of their ability to pay.

The clinic's integrative model means that every patient who walks in the door for any medical issue gets treatment addressing their needs, "mind, body, and soul." Health educators often sit in on appointments to help patients connect lifestyle and diet to medical issues; all patients are asked screening questions about their nutrition, oral, mental, and reproductive health.

"Every day, I see the difference that working in a truly integrated model makes in the lives of our patients," says the SCCC's Medical Director, Christine Hoppe, M.D. "As in most clinics, many patients who come for medical care have financial and social stressors, mental health diagnoses, substance abuse problems, and/or concurrent dental disease. When they come to the SCCC for care, we're able to address all of these issues during a

single visit, and are set up to provide follow up with a multidisciplinary team."

The SCCC's integrative care model has been nationally recognized. Clinic staff have traveled to Washington D.C. twice to speak to Senate committees and the organization has received numerous nominations for the title of "Outstanding Non-Profit" by several major foundation funders.

Now housed in a comfortable suite of offices, the clinic's beginnings were much more humble. Back in 1991, long time local family practice physician Jim Oberheide, M.D., found himself frustrated by the local healthcare infrastructure's inability to provide medical care to those who struggled to afford it.

"Obviously Summit County is not the Bronx," wrote Oberheide in a letter to fellow physicians requesting their help in establishing a volunteer clinic, "and our problems pale in comparison to other areas. But... we may tend to ignore the poor we have, and these people are really falling through the cracks."

Two years later, in 1993, Oberheide's idea took shape as a one-night-per-week walk-in clinic staffed by volunteers. The SCCC is now open five days a week, run by a full time staff. Funding comes from state and local government, patient fees, and private foundations. Donations also help—the local community has embraced the clinic. Its primary fundraising event, "Soup for the Soul, Bread for the Clinic," takes place each March and has sold out the past several years.

"Some of the people who come into the clinic are very desperate," says Brandi Thompson, the clinic's Development Coordinator. "They are just looking for help, and are often used to being shunned. But at the clinic, everyone is so passionate about helping them, empowering them, and making their lives better. It is so wonderful to be able to tell them 'I'm so glad you're here. We want to help you.' It humbles you. And it's very rewarding." ❄️



Get Involved

Check out the SCCC's website for more information and dates for this year's "Soup for the Soul, Bread for the Clinic" and other fundraising events at summitclinic.org.

The SCCC is also running an endowment campaign as part of its 20th anniversary celebration.