Inside and Outside the Hospital: How Our Students Are Supporting Charlottesville’s Homeless Population

Steven Neal and Jeff Bellinger are both Class of 2024 medical students with a unified mission to advocate and support one of Charlottesville’s most vulnerable populations, our community members facing homelessness. Steven Neal is an executive for the School of Medicine’s Charlottesville Homeless Health Outreach Program, and Jeffrey is heavily involved with our student-led inpatient Homeless Consult Service. We were able to speak with them on their efforts.

**Q: Jeff, tell us more about the Homelessness Consult Service! Do you have any examples of what you all assist with?**

A: The [UVA Homeless Consult Service](https://www.medicalcenter.virginia.edu/population-health/programs/inpthousinginsecuritycs/) (HCS) is a medical student-run inpatient consult service that works in collaboration with social work, Interactive Home Monitoring (IHM) coordinators, and case managers to connect patients experiencing homelessness with the information and resources they need. Much of the work we do involves assisting in the shelter intake process, filling out Medicaid, cell phone, SNAP, and transportation forms, coordinating outpatient follow-up, and much more. Our goal is to remove some of the barriers to care so that each member of our community receives equitable healthcare.

**Q: Steven, now that we have a better understanding of efforts going on inside the hospital, can you tell us more about the Charlottesville Homeless Health Outreach Program (CHHOP)?**

A: Much of our outreach centers around weekly volunteer events we refer to as Health Navigation Nights. Health Navigation Nights involve medical student volunteers traveling to a long-term housing community for people who are experiencing homeless and have health problems. Student volunteers go door-to-door to speak with residents, establishing rapport and developing trust, while assessing healthcare needs and assisting residents. Frequent tasks students assist with are Medicare/Medicaid and financial aid applications, scheduling vaccinations, medication refills, scheduling ambulatory PCP and specialist appointments, and arranging transportation to/from appointments.

**Q: Reflecting on your experiences, how do you think this will shape your journey as future physicians?**

A:

Steven:

My involvement with [CHHOP](https://blog.uvahealth.com/2021/12/29/favorites-of-2021-healthcare-homeless/) and the time I've spent trying to better understand the unique challenges faced daily by those experiencing homeless - in all aspects of life - has refined my view of the systemic and psychosocial forces that contribute to and perpetuate poverty, trauma, illness, and despair. At the same time, having opportunities to develop meaningful, longitudinal relationships with members of this community has shown me in novel ways the common features of the human condition experienced by all of us.

Jeff:

As a future physician, I will have the insight that it is not possible to separate the disease from the person. We must treat patients holistically and try to address the barriers that cause increased morbidity, readmission, and death. Too often we as students and providers think that we don't have the power to change "the system"... but there are ways to make changes that alter the course of an individual's life if we have the desire to seek them out.

Interested in getting involved?

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