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NEWS

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235 (214)688-3404

MEDIA CONTACT: Ann Harrell
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/369-2695

***Dallas' Young Adult Clinic combats death and disability in young people.

DALLAS--Looking for the real problem--the problem behind the problem--is the aim of Dallas' new Young Adult Clinic, a program of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas.

The Young Adult Clinic is a consultation, diagnostic and referral center for young people 12-24 years of age, located in the main floor Outpatient Clinic area in Parkland Memorial Hospital. The clinic, says the program's head social worker Barbara Polk, deals with high risk problems of that age group leading to death and major illnesses. Services include:

- *Treatment for sexually transmitted diseases
- *Alcohol and drug information and referrals
- *Family planning education and referrals
- *Crisis counseling, intervention and psychiatric referral
- *General health education.

Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Young Adult Clinic is one of 20 such programs in the country in 18 different cities where local statistics point to a major need for intervention in death and disability. Major causes in the 15-24 age group are not diseases, but such things as drug overdose, alcohol abuse, suicide, homicide, automobile and motorcycle accidents, mental illness, sexually transmitted diseases (VD) and problems related to teen-age pregnancy.

These problems, which cut across socio-economic lines in the county, contribute to an unusually high death rate and impact heavily on the quality of life of its citizens. Statistics show that the suicide rate among young people in Dallas is two and a half times the national average with teen-age homicides three times as high as the national average. Also high statistically in Dallas County are serious medical problems resulting from these high-risk psychosocial problems. Gonorrhea in all age groups is two and one-half times the norm, and the syphilis rate is four times the national average.

A study done by Dr. Barry Tuchfeld at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth showed that 83 percent of Dallas high school seniors, both public and private schools, were drinking alcoholic beverages, and as many as 51 percent of the seventh graders also reported drinking. Arrests for drug related offenses, including possession, are four times the national average in the 15-24 age group. And births among 15-19-year-olds are one and one-half times greater than the national statistics. In fact, Texas is currently first in the number of births to teen-age mothers. This figure, however, gives no clue to the number of pregnancies that may have been interrupted.

This year the Young Adult Clinic has seen a total of 4,178 young people in its first six months of operation, says Dr. Robert McGovern, director of the program. McGovern is also professor of Pediatrics at UTHSCD and director of its outstanding Children and Youth Project, which has achieved national recognition for combating death and disability in the pediatric population of a medically underserved area in Dallas. One thousand of the teens and young adults were seen for general medical/pediatric diagnosis and referral, and also screened for general health problems. Other problems that sent people to the Young Adult Clinic were in the areas of obstetrics, gynecology, mental health counseling, substance abuse problems, family planning and sexually transmitted diseases.

The largest age group who sought the clinic's services was adults between 20-24. Second largest was the 15-19-year-old group. The sex distribution was close to even, with some more females attending the clinic than males. This should be expected, however, says Polk because of the large number of OB/Gyn problems seen.

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Each patient at the clinic, says Polk, whether referred from the Parkland Emergency Room or from community agencies, physicians, schools, churches, parents--or even the young people themselves, is seen by a health team specializing in adolescent medicine. First there is an initial screening by a public health nurse who assigns the patient to a physician or nurse practitioner, depending on the problem.

Following the medical treatment and/or assessment, the patient is interviewed by the clinic social worker who continues the evaluation of the patient's medical and psychosocial needs. An individual plan of treatment is worked out by the health team and presented to the patient. Contacts are made to cooperating referral sources, and appointments are made for continued care.

Team members try to be especially sensitive to "the problem behind the problem." What brings the patient to the hospital or even the Young Adult Clinic itself may only be a clue to what's going on that's destructive in the patient's life, says Polk. For example, a motorcycle accident, especially if it's repeated, may be strongly indicative of suicidal behavior. Even athletic injuries--if there's a pattern--may be pointing to a desire to hurt oneself.

"In cases like these, what you're looking for are problems of human behavior," says Dr. Drew Alexander, medical consultant to the Young Adult Clinic. Alexander, who is a clinical assistant professor in Pediatrics and has a private practice primarily in adolescent medicine, has been working with young people and their medical and social problems for a number of years.

"We have to be receptive, listen carefully, negotiate, be there to help and elicit cooperation when we deal with patients. Otherwise, nothing is going to happen. The health professional has to assertively get the interest of each patient in helping him or herself--or there will be no treatment."

Polk agrees. "All these high-risk categories are symptoms of the lack of quality of life. We have a fine staff that is very caring and concerned about the health needs of our patients. I want the patient to use the clinic to find resources to get what they want out of their lives. I don't expect that the program will be able to do that for everyone who walks in the door--but that's my goal," she says.

All Dallas County teen-agers and young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 are eligible for services at the Young Adult Clinic. Minors must be accompanied, however, by a parent or legal guardian.

Clinic visits cost \$10. A \$5.00 deposit is required at the time of the initial visit. There is no charge, however, for follow-up visits on the same problem. Such charges as prescription drugs and laboratory tests are additional, and prescriptions filled at Parkland require a \$5.00 partial payment by the patient.

Hours are 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. The clinic is closed on weekends and holidays. The clinic is located in Parkland at 5201 Harry Hines on the first floor clinic area. Transportation is easily available from downtown by bus on the 26 Hines, 40 Brockbank and 43 Park Forest, as well as the 9 Crosstown.

For information and patient appointments call 637-8760.

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