

Volunteerism Spotlight - Antonio Rios

Good News Clinics: How A First Job Made a Volunteer for Life

Antonio Rios, M.D., FACP, chief physician executive at Northeast Georgia Physician's Group (Gainesville, Ga.) got his professional start volunteering at the [Good News Clinics](#) and has continued volunteering regularly for more than 20 years. He recently spoke to Georgia ACP about why this free clinic is so important to the community and to him.

How did you get your start at Good News Clinics?

I am originally from Mexico. So, when I finished my residency, I was waiting for my J-1 visa to begin working at HCA (now Northeast Georgia Health System), since Hall County qualified as a Health Professional Shortage Area. Northeast Georgia Health System is a big supporter of the clinic. They told me about it, and I started volunteering there full-time until my paperwork came through six months later. Twenty-two years later I still go one day a month, every month. I have been on the clinic's board for many years.

Who does the clinic serve and what services does it provide?

The clinic serves uninsured folks in Hall County that do not qualify for Medicaid, Medicare, or private insurance. We screen all patients regardless of citizenship or legal status. The clinic is open normal office hours, five days a week and serves 7,000 medical patients yearly. We have both medical and dental clinics, staffed by volunteer physicians. We take care of any internal medicine problems – all sorts of chronic medical conditions. Onsite we have a nutritionist, a diabetes educator, behavioral health, physical therapy and occupational therapy. We work with local colleges. It is all funded by foundations and grants. We also have some volunteer specialists through the Health Access program that enables specialty referrals, diagnostic tests, and treatment for uninsured patients.



Why is volunteering at the clinic important to you?

I went into medicine to try to help people. This is a patient population that is very vulnerable, that is difficult to reach, and that really struggles. I think that this is an important part of the community – something that distinguishes this community – that it is really invested in taking care of all. I feel privileged that I have the ability to do a little bit.

What advice would you give to physicians considering volunteering at a free clinic in their community?

Volunteering at Good News Clinic has been one of the most enriching parts of practicing internal medicine. You have the ability to interact with people from all walks of life, to learn more about what really happens in the community. The patients are so grateful that they are receiving care, but I too, get so much from being there. When I first started volunteering there, I got to meet so many peers from the community – the physician and dentist volunteers. But over the years has been a humbling experience to be able to help and do my part in taking care of the community. It is a little like Hotel California – you'll never want to leave!

