Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation

The Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation operates medical mobile units that provide asthma treatment and services across the Chicago area.

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois has one of the highest morbidity and mortality rates of asthma in the United States, with the majority of asthma-related deaths in Chicago and the greater Chicago area.¹ The Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation is tackling the asthma problem in Chicago by using mobile vans to treat youth with asthma in underserved areas. Over 10 years ago, the Foundation bought and retrofitted two RVs that have all the medical equipment and capacity that would be found in an asthma specialist’s doctor’s office. Each van has a salaried physician or nurse practitioner who is an asthma specialist. Because the providers are salaried, children are able to consistently see the same person for treatment.

The mobile clinics travel to different schools in the Chicago area that are known to have high rates of asthma. They approach schools and conduct an initial survey of all the students to screen for those who may be exhibiting symptoms of asthma. After analyzing the surveys, they reach out to parents of children who might have asthma and invite the child to the van for a more thorough examination and diagnosis. Because they identify youth through the school, they reach many children that may have gone undiagnosed for years.

The mobile clinics currently work with 32 schools and try to visit each one once a month. Clinic staff strive to have children see the same provider for each visit and try to be as culturally sensitive as possible. Many staffers are bilingual and all educational materials are available in both English and Spanish.

The first half of every appointment is spent assessing the child’s health status and the second part is devoted to educating the child and caregiver. For example, providers may make sure children and their caregivers understand how to use various medications, what the medications do, and what might cause an asthma

¹ http://www.idph.state.il.us/pdf/Asthma_State_Plan_3rd_Edit.pdf
attack. Asthma is often triggered by allergens, so providers will also frequently conduct allergy tests to help diagnose any unknown allergies. By spending so much time on education, the likelihood of compliance is increased and when those rates are higher, children do not have to be seen as frequently. This cuts down on waitlist times for other youth who need to be seen and who might otherwise not have access to care.

Mobile asthma clinics are making services easier to use in many ways! Surveys distributed to parents by the Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation consistently show that they appreciate both the comfortable environment and convenience of the vans. Because the vans are at the child’s school, they are usually close to the child’s home and parents don’t have to worry about parking. Furthermore, instead of children having to miss hours of school to travel to a doctor’s appointment, they are only absent for the duration of their appointment, which is often less than an hour. Also, since the vans don’t overbook, patients are seen on time. Parents value the predictability and consistency of appointment times and scheduling. The clinic’s staff really emphasize and value communication with parents, so if there is a change in scheduling, they make multiple attempts to contact families.

Last year the Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation created and implemented the “Community Health Worker Pilot,” during which a CHW was stationed in a school and worked closely with the school nurse and administrators. All faculty at the school knew to direct a child with asthma to the CHW who could make an appointment for the child with the asthma van and ensure the child received ongoing care. The CHW also called families to remind them of appointments. Parents had an overwhelmingly positive response to the project, so the Foundation is currently trying to find funding for more CHWs.

“It’s important to have providers in our clinics that understand and take seriously a family’s concern, especially when we’re encouraging them to do something they might be nervous about doing.”

-- Matt Siemer

The Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation has collected extensive data to show the effectiveness of their vans. The national average of school absenteeism due to asthma is five or more days per year. In the year before enrolling in the Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation program, 39% of parents reported that their child had missed 5 or more days of school and 33% said their child was hospitalized or rushed to the ER because of asthma. After joining the mobile clinic program, only 5% and 4% of children missed that much school and were hospitalized or rushed to the ER, respectively. The Foundation also had a third party analyst look at the cost of providing comprehensive care for each child. They found that while it costs the state of Illinois over $15,000 per asthmatic child who has to be hospitalized, Foundation only needs $900 per year to provide full care.

Between the convenience of asthma vans and their commitment to improving the lives of children with asthma, the Mobile C.A.R.E. Foundation is truly making services easier to use!

For more information, please visit www.mobilecarefoundation.org.