



## **Perspective/Opinion**

# **The Mission of the Saturday Clinic for the Uninsured**

By Thomas Ritter

As a fourth-year medical student who has finished his residency interviews, I find myself truly startled at the amount of free time I have. In addition to savoring every possible moment of my freedom before residency starts, I've begun to reflect on my time at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

The highlight of my experience has undoubtedly been working at the Saturday Clinic for the Uninsured (SCU). SCU is a student-run free clinic for patients without health insurance that operates at the intersection of North and Humboldt on, you guessed it, Saturdays. In addition to a name that is quite "on the nose," SCU has been a staple of the Milwaukee community for over twenty years. Our mission is to provide comprehensive, patient-centered, and equitable care to Milwaukee's uninsured population.

Uninsured patients in Milwaukee face an array of challenges to access healthcare and we have shaped SCU to meet the needs of our community. We have grown to become a long-term home for our patients to receive healthcare by marshalling resources at MCW and Milwaukee hospitals to provide access to lab work, mammograms, and specialists including ophthalmology, dermatology, and rheumatology. We offer an in-house dispensary of medications at no cost to our patients and have established a partnership with Seton Pharmacy at Ascension Columbia St. Mary's to provide any medication we don't have for a low-cost rate. We evaluate and address the social determinants of health for all of our patients, including food insecurity, legal assistance, and housing instability. As the COVID-19 pandemic began, our managers created a telehealth program so that patients could be seen remotely, and our education and resource team created a website for patients to access all of our resources from home (<https://milwaukee-scu-patient-resources.my-free.website/resources>).

In addition to its mission to provide comprehensive, patient-centered, and equitable care, SCU also aims to enrich the cultural humility and clinical competencies of its student volunteers. This second mission has certainly been achieved in my personal and professional life. Early in medical school, I was an eager learner of anatomy, pharmacology, and pathophysiology. While I certainly remain interested in these subjects of medicine, my experience at SCU has revealed to

me the broader picture of medicine—to identify and critically examine the ways in which our patients, insured or not, encounter obstacles to receiving care. Whether the obstacle lies outside of healthcare, such as access to affordable transportation, or is an internal obstacle, such as racism in medicine, truly comprehensive care requires intervention on both a personal and societal level. SCU has taught me that providing patient-centered care requires grace to meet patients where they are, see the world through their eyes, and act accordingly. Providing equitable care necessitates intentional introspection and the evaluation of my own biases on a daily basis.

I believe SCU's contribution to the Milwaukee community is difficult to truly measure. While direct patient care can be quantified by the number of patients seen or referrals sent, the impression SCU makes on its volunteers who go out and serve in their own way after graduating, although intangible, cannot be overlooked. I am becoming a family medicine physician because of my time at SCU, and I am only one of many volunteers in SCU's long history who enter healthcare with a heart for service and dedication for justice. I am grateful to have worked at SCU and encourage all who are interested to volunteer there as well.

*Thomas Ritter is a member of the MCW-Milwaukee Class of 2022. He is applying to Family Medicine residencies.*