

Healthy Children

June 1998

Executive Summary

The Commission on the Public's Health System undertook an organizing, education, and advocacy project to preserve the Child Health Clinics in New York City. The clinics, begun as Milk Stations and then Well-Baby Stations, were started in 1908. They have continuously provided services free of charge for low income, uninsured and immigrant children since that time. The importance of these clinics in providing preventive and primary care services to infants and young children, cannot be under-estimated. They are a major provider of immunizations to young children and have contributed to greatly reducing childhood illnesses. The clinics are a major source of education and care for asthmatic children -- a huge and growing epidemic in New York City. The continued existence of these clinics at this time is threatened. Our children are our future--a review of the current, and future threats, to these clinics is important.

The Commission -- concerned about a decentralization of the clinics within the Health and Hospitals Corporation structure, and the potential for major changes in the way that the clinics operate -- developed a special project with the New School for Social Research. Students were provided to visit Child Health Clinics and interview the parents of children who use these clinics. The survey instrument included sixteen questions as well as an opportunity for the respondents to comment more generally on the services of the clinics. One hundred forty two parents were interviewed using this survey form at ten of the 39 clinics in four of the five boroughs. The findings from this survey showed incredibly strong support for and high satisfaction with the Child Health Clinics. Results show:

Concern was raised about the decentralization of the clinics.

Findings from the survey show incredibly strong support for the Child Health Clinics.

- 70% of the children go for check-ups and primary care and 48.5% go for immunizations.
- 37% of the children have been using the Child Health Clinics for over 3 years. One parent said: "she initially used the clinic 18 years ago when she had her first child and is currently using it for the past two years for her asthmatic two-year-old."
- 135 parents (95%) indicated they were satisfied with the services, only four indicated dissatisfaction. One parent said: "Even though I have Medicaid and have been seen by private physicians in the past, I prefer the Child Health Clinic because the examination is more in-depth."

- 44% (63) of the children whose parents were interviewed had Medicaid; 49% (70) had no health insurance.
- Not one parent indicated that they have ever been asked to pay for services, although Medicaid is billed for services when children are eligible.
- 93% of the parents who responded (132 of the 135) found the clinic hours convenient.
- 82% of the parents said they could get an immediate appointment when their child was sick.
- 64% of the parents said they waited less than half an hour for their child to be seen the day of the appointment.
- 84% of the parents who responded to the question, said the doctor knows their child.
- 99.3% of the parents said that the clinic staff is friendly, respectful and helpful.
- 98.5% said that information is presented in an understandable manner. One parent said: "The doctors always take time to explain what they are doing. Also they never let me leave until they know I understand."

Quotes are cited below from three of the students which confirm the observations that parents are pleased with the services provided. These quotes include:

- "Most of the children in my study were uninsured. If these clinics were to begin charging a sliding fee they would not be able to afford the services. Where would a 17-year old single unemployed mother find money to pay for medical services or even for vaccinations?"

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- "In speaking with many of the participants in the survey, I learned that the Child Health Clinics have served as the provider of healthcare for several children within a family and through the excellent rapport and favorable experience with the clinics' staff, they have referred the clinics to other friends and relatives."

- "The Child Health Clinics can also be seen as a line of defense against common health problems facing inner city children, particularly the large minority groups which it serves."
- "The clinics level the playing field by offering the same high quality and comprehensive services to all, numerous sites from which patients can choose reducing travel time, providing services on a needs basis not by ability to pay, extending office hours to accommodate its populations' needs, assuming the advocacy role by educating patients and offering programs on Window guards, Reach Out and Read and Community Interpreter, and maintaining high standards of ethics and integrity."
- "All of the clinic users I interviewed were highly satisfied with the quality and range of services offered at the clinic; the services they rely on include: immunizations, check-ups, asthma treatment, and routine illness treatment. More than half of the users even rely on the clinics in case of emergency."

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- "The interviews I conducted at the Roebing clinic indicate that the child health clinics provide high quality, accessible care to a population with little or no insurance, and little geographic mobility. Despite serious health problems which concern this population, particularly asthma, most clinic users are hesitant to use any health services outside the clinic."
- "The child health clinics are among the last outposts of sites providing equitable health care to people regardless of their ability to pay in the new climate of managed care health plan systems. Their proximity to their patient base, and their lack of fee incentives to structure the quality and type of care they provide ensure their continued commitment to providing equitable care."

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In a separate effort, a member of the Elmhurst Hospital Community Board visited two of the Child Health Clinics in Queens where she interviewed staff and patients. One patient said: "she has been coming to the clinic for seven years. She gave birth at Elmhurst Hospital and has visited the clinic since. The friendly staff is 'like family now.' She has two children and no health insurance."

The Commission has a series of **recommendations** that grow from our outreach to parents, advocacy efforts, and the results of this survey. They are:

- continue community monitoring of the performance of the Child Health Clinics and do a follow-up survey to determine if there is a continuing high level of satisfaction with the services;
- ensure continued city and state funding for the Child Health Clinics under contract with the city Health Department, which must monitor the performance of the clinics;
- maintain the focus on child health services, do not add adult services in these small clinics which could interfere with the current services being provided;
- keep the free service guarantee for medical care and medications when children do not have health insurance, while at the same time billing Medicaid and Child Health Plus when the children have coverage;
- provide financial screening for eligibility for Medicaid and Child Health Plus, but do not mandate this screening as a requirement for receiving services;
- keep the Child Health Clinics in their current neighborhoods; and
- maintain and improve the level of family-friendly, culturally and linguistically competent services.

Commission on the Public's Health System

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