

# The Phillips Neighborhood Clinic: Addressing Health Disparities in Central Minneapolis

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The Phillips neighborhood in the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota is home to many recent immigrants and ethnic minorities. More than 68% of the community's residents are non-white compared to 35% citywide.<sup>1</sup> Many residents of the Phillips neighborhood struggle financially; approximately 38% of all families live below the federal poverty line.<sup>2</sup> Since 2003, a student-run free clinic called the Phillips Neighborhood Clinic (PNC) has provided medical services to area residents. In this article, we describe the Phillips neighborhood and the PNC, with an emphasis on the role of public health nutrition (PHN) students and preceptors in providing nutrition counseling services for the clinic.

Food access is an issue for Phillips neighborhood residents; residents experience the second highest prevalence of food insecurity in the Twin Cities.<sup>3</sup> More than 37% of residents consume one or fewer servings of fruit or vegetables in a given day, and 61% of residents report eating at least one meal outside of the home per day.<sup>4</sup> The neighborhood contains numerous corner stores and ethnic markets, but only one grocery store. Several grocery stores are located within a short drive of the neighborhood, but more than 60% of area residents do not have reliable access to a car, making it difficult for them to shop at these stores.<sup>3</sup>

Residents of the Phillips neighborhood also experience health disparities; rates of overweight, obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease are elevated relative to state-level data. More than one third of adult residents are overweight, and 17% are obese. However, nutrition-focused health education is inadequate. When surveyed, less than 25% of residents reported they had been told by a doctor that they should lose weight to improve their health.<sup>4</sup> The neighborhood-wide prevalence of diabetes is approximately 10%, and the prevalence of hypertension is 22%, which is considerably higher than the city-wide rates of 5% and 15%, respectively.<sup>3,4</sup>

To address the health disparities of the Phillips Neighborhood, Dr. John Song, an assistant professor of medicine and bioethics at the University of Minnesota (UMN), created the PNC in 2003.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Song started the clinic with the mission of providing “accessible, culturally appropriate, interdisciplinary health care services and education in order to reduce the burdens of poor medical access and raise the quality of life for patients.” The clinic also provides students in the health professions (public health nutrition, medicine, pharmacy, nursing, social work, and physical therapy) with the opportunity to develop their patient care skills and interact with a diverse patient population.

For the past five years, the free clinic has operated under the supervision of Dr. Brian Sick and the student-led PNC board. To become a clinic volunteer, students from each of the

participating health professions are required to apply. Accepted students agree to volunteer at the clinic for a two-year term. The clinic is open two evenings a week, but the clinic is staffed by a rotating roster of students, so that each student works only one clinic night per month. Students are joined by licensed clinicians from each specialty who supervise the care they provide. After the first year, students can run for positions on the PNC Student Board. The PNC Student Board coordinates every aspect of the clinic—managing clinic finances, community relations, operations, and human resources.

The PNC provides access to vital health services for uninsured and underinsured patients. Services provided by the clinic include physical exams, laboratory testing, pharmaceutical prescriptions and refills, nutrition education, physical therapy, mental health counseling, and assistance with medical assistance application forms. The clinic does not charge for services, lab work, or medications, although those services cost an average of \$105 per patient.<sup>7</sup> Funds for the clinic come from fundraising efforts such as concerts, races, auctions, and donations from the health profession's schools participating at the clinic. Fairview Health Services and UMN physicians are two community partners that also play a major role in financing the clinic.<sup>6</sup>

A defining aspect of the PNC is its multidisciplinary approach to providing quality medical care to patients. After medical and pharmacy students and preceptors conduct an initial assessment of each patient, students and preceptors from all participating health professions meet to discuss an appropriate care plan for the patient. For example, a patient who presents with depression and hypertension might receive medication for their high blood pressure, counseling from the mental health team, and nutrition counseling from the nutrition team.

Nutrition counseling is one of the services provided at the PNC. During the initial consultation, patients are asked if they would like to meet with the nutrition team, which includes a PHN student and a Registered Dietitian. Patients who agree to receive nutrition services often have hypertension or diabetes, or are overweight or obese. Further, because many residents face challenges that influence their dietary habits and nutritional status (time, money, access to transportation and healthy food venues, cultural traditions and beliefs), they have limited exposure to accurate nutrition information necessary to make healthy lifestyle changes. These concerns are addressed during the preceptor-supervised nutrition counseling. This helps to ensure that the nutrition advice is culturally competent, relevant, and appropriate for the clients. Spanish translators are usually present to assist with communication. Students chart the visit using EPIC medical record software. After the nutrition consultation, preceptors give students feedback on their counseling techniques and suggestions for improvement.

PHN students who are involved with the clinic tend to find the experience informative and rewarding. Working with patients in the community makes classroom learning more relevant. It

allows students to integrate and apply their public health, nutrition education, and clinical nutrition skills in one setting. Volunteering at the PNC is also a great way to meet other dietitians and preceptors. The PNC has served as a model for the development of other free clinics throughout the United States, and serves as a model training opportunity for public health and community nutrition dietitians.

**Table 1.** Phillips Neighborhood Demographics.<sup>1,2,6</sup>

Population	19,805
Poverty: Percent of all residents with incomes below the federal poverty line	34% (compared to 17% city-wide)
Poverty: Percent of all families with incomes below the federal poverty line	38%
Residents without health insurance	34%
Non-white residents	68% (compared to 35% city-wide)
Median household income in 1999	\$22,044 (compared to \$37,974 city-wide)

## References

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# National Nutrition Month® March 2013

Food preferences, lifestyles, cultural and ethnic traditions and health concerns all affect food choices. That is why, as part of National Nutrition Month® 2013, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is encouraging everyone to “Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day.”

Each March, the Academy encourages Americans to return to the basics of healthy eating through National Nutrition Month. This year’s theme emphasizes the advantages of developing a healthful eating plan that incorporates individual food choices and preferences.



Initiated in 1973 as a week-long event, “National Nutrition Week” became a month-long observance in 1980 in response to growing public interest in nutrition. This year the Academy is celebrating the 40th anniversary of National Nutrition Month (NNM). For more NNM history, visit “About NNM” at [www.eatright.org/NNM/content.aspx?id=7832](http://www.eatright.org/NNM/content.aspx?id=7832).

To commemorate the dedication of registered dietitians as the leading advocates for advancing the nutritional status of Americans and people around the world, the second Wednesday of each March is celebrated as “Registered Dietitian Day.” This year marks the sixth annual Registered Dietitian Day, which will be celebrated March 13.

As part of the campaign, the National Nutrition Month website, [www.eatright.org/nnm](http://www.eatright.org/nnm), includes a variety of nutrition tip sheets, recipes, games, a promotional toolkit and catalog, all designed to spread the message of good nutrition based on the “Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day” theme.

If you have additional questions, please contact Mary Uhrick, Project Manager, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics [muhrick@eatright.org](mailto:muhrick@eatright.org).