

Homeless/Medical Street Outreach - December 2020

Overview

Working in collaboration with the University of Florida College of Medicine/Mobile Outreach Clinic and Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc., Community Support Services continues to coordinate homeless/medical outreach services and COVID testing in the field. Teams comprised of a behavioral healthcare staff from Meridian and two to three 3rd and 4th year medical students are dispatched to known encampments and other locations where the homeless congregate.

Existing homeless outreach staff developed a training module for the medical students to help them understand the purpose of the project, how to engage homeless individuals, and street safety practices. Alachua County grant funded (CABHI) staff coordinated schedules and provided directions on where to conduct street outreach based on zones throughout the county, e.g., Depot Park, NE 39th Avenue, I-75/Newberry corridor, etc. Working together with the College of Medicine, a written protocol was developed to guide the medical students through the process. The teams assess the homeless for COVID like symptoms, collect test specimens, and provide basic medical care like wound dressings. The teams also distribute survival supplies including shelf stable food boxes, personal hygiene items, face masks and hand sanitizer.

The teams are grateful for the many donations that have been received to support its mission. The United Way of North Central Florida donated goodie bags, bottled water, and sanitizer. The Salvation Army donated hundreds of personal hygiene kits containing hand soap, shampoo, and other personal necessities. The Helping Hands Clinic donated a case of bug repellent which was very useful for both the homeless and the volunteers conducting outreach. UF Health Street donated feminine hygiene products and clothing. Recognizing the medical students volunteerism the Rotary Club donated gas cards to help offset some of their out of pocket expenses.

Since early April 2020, teams have been dispatched on a recurring basis and over 300 homeless people have been engaged and assessed. Less than 10 people displayed Covid like symptoms or otherwise requested to be tested. Most test results came back negative and those who tested positive indicated they had a place to safely self-isolate.

Upcoming Activities

The outreach model has evolved considerably since its inception. Today, it is organized as a street medicine model. Teams go out every Thursday, both early morning (7:30 - 9:30 am) and afternoon (1:00-3:00 pm). UF developed an electronic medical record which is used to case manage many of the homeless individuals we have developed an ongoing relationship with over the course of the pandemic. With available CARES funding, Alachua County has purchased a large supply of survival items which will be distributed the week of December 14, 2020. Both the medical students and Meridian staff will assist in distributing over 200 goodie bags containing personal hygiene items as well as cold weather supplies including gloves, socks, Mylar blankets, and beanie caps. We will also be distributing another pallet of approximately 150 food boxes.