

Dozens of volunteers ready to lend a hand at RAM Ohio's free health fair at Cuyahoga fairgrounds

Posted by [jmorona](#) March 16, 2009 22:00PM



They expected doctors and nurses to volunteer.

It's all about health care, after all -- this giant two-day medical clinic coming to the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds Saturday, May 2, and Sunday, May 3.

Organizers weren't surprised when dentists and optometrists offered to work for free, either.

What's amazing the people behind the Remote Area Medical Volunteer Corps of Ohio -- RAM Ohio, for short -- is everybody else who's offering services at no charge.



Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer "Lots of people can't afford haircuts and I thought it would be nice to give to them. If other barbers want to donate time, that'd be great. And if there are any beauticians out there that are interested in helping, we'd appreciate that, too." -- Joe

Dauria, barber

There's Joe Dauria, the barber from Fratantonio's in Shaker Heights, who's signed up to cut hair while people wait to be treated.

There's Susie Porter, owner of the Town Fryer at the Agora, who's agreed to cook pots full of chicken and gumbo for hundreds of people expected at the thank-you party she'll throw for volunteers on Saturday night.

There's Jeremy Mackinder, who's driving into town from Flint, Mich., with four other members of the band Whitey Morgan and the 78's, to play at that party.

And that's just the beginning.

About 100 lawyers from the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and area law firms have offered to provide free legal advice on housing, income and other issues.

Dozens of groups -- from the American Heart Association to Hospice of the Western Reserve -- will hand out literature and answer questions on health topics from nutrition to domestic violence.

And high school students, retirees and former Peace Corps volunteers will do whatever else needs to be done.



Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer "I feel like it's a really, really important cause for us as a community to be helping with, especially in this current economic time. And I just feel like it's something I have to be a part of. It's like the essence of solidarity." -- Cassie Denbow, Beaumont High School senior

So many people called Hands On Northeast Ohio, the nonprofit organization handling RAM Ohio's nonmedical volunteers, that the group had to put some of them to work immediately. It needed them to answer all the calls coming in from other people who wanted to chip in.

"We've got a trucking company offering to help move equipment and somebody wants to do back massages while people wait in line," says Zac Ponsky, the 33-year-old banker from Cleveland Heights who's organizing the event to help the under- and uninsured in Ohio.

"They're just coming in by the dozens."

Ponsky began pulling the event together about 10 months ago, after he saw a similar one, in Tennessee, featured on "60 Minutes."

Even though there is free health care available in Northeast Ohio, many people go without it for all kinds of reasons. Some earn too much to qualify for treatment. Others need dental and eye care, which few free clinics offer. There are no requirements -- income, residency or otherwise -- to be treated by RAM Ohio.

With more than six weeks to go, the organization has hundreds of doctors and nurses, X-ray technicians and dentists, optometrists, dental hygienists, EMTs, pharmacists, lab technicians and other health-care workers armed with millions of dollars in on-loan equipment and donated supplies ready to provide two straight days of health care to as many people as they possibly can -- for free.

Since word's gotten out, other members of the medical community have asked to help, too.

Psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers have agreed to screen people for mental-health problems such as anxiety and depression, provide on-the-spot counseling and help patients find follow-up care.



Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer"There's a lot of people out there that are uninsured and people that are homeless and if I can make a difference for one person, that makes me feel better. I just go with my heart. If somebody needs something, I just go." -- Lida Whitfield, breast cancer outreach program volunteer

Twelve physicians, at least 40 other volunteers and two mammogram vans are coming from MetroHealth Medical Center. They're prepared to conduct as many as 130 mammograms on Saturday, then notify patients of the results within a week. If those results are abnormal, they'll provide follow-up care, too.

Top doctors from University Hospitals Case Medical Center have signed on to see patients, too, including transplant surgeon Dr. Mark Aeder, chief of pain medicine Dr. Salim Hayek, cancer specialist Dr. Lois Teston and chief of gynecological oncology Dr. Steven Waggoner.

And Dr. Steven Nissen, chairman of the Cleveland Clinic's department of cardiovascular medicine, has urged doctors in his department to join him at the event.

The project, he says, reminds him of work he did in rural communities when he was completing his fellowship at the University of Kentucky.

"It was one of the most interesting and rewarding experiences I've had," Nissen told his co-workers.

Everybody has his or her reasons for helping.



Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer "Tai

chi is so accessible and effective -- we're wearing our own equipment. And I've always dreamed of free classes all over the city." Susan Cady, Tai chi instructor

"Being in a band, you're used to not having insurance," says Mackinder, the bass player and manager for Whitey Morgan and the 78's.

"Out of the last 10, I've had it for probably two years, so I totally get what they're doing. But I only have it for another two weeks because we're in Detroit and my wife just got laid off."

RAM Ohio takes Christy Bartley back to her days in the Peace Corps in El Salvador, when she and her husband translated for Americans who traveled there on medical mission trips.

That's why she'll be at the fairgrounds along with about 20 other members of the Northeast Ohio Return Volunteer Association, or NORVA.

"I think that it's really important in this time of our lives in the world today that people come together and they offer whatever services they have to other people," says Porter, who's pulling together the volunteer party at the Agora with its free food and music.

"Give and take. That's what makes the world go 'round."

See a specialist, have a checkup, but expect to wait

If you head to the RAM Ohio event for free health care, you'll have access to a lot more than diabetes testing and blood-pressure checks.

Ultrasounds, EKGs, Pap tests and mammograms will be offered. So will mental-health counseling, dental care, eye exams and prescription glasses.

Specialists who will be seeing patients include cardiologists, gynecologists, pediatricians, podiatrists, rheumatologists, urologists and experts in family medicine, infectious disease and internal medicine.

And you don't have to be sick to go, says organizer Zac Ponsky.

"You can come to this event to get your annual primary-care physical, your checkup," he says.

But be prepared to wait.

"These are all volunteers doing this for the first time ever in Ohio," Ponsky says. "We're going to try to see as many people as we can, but we can't guarantee that we'll see everybody.

"We're not going to be able to change the world in two days, but if we can identify some problems that people have, we'll have begun to accomplish our goals."

If you want to attend or help out

Want to go?

If you need free medical care, head to the Bagley Road entrance of the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds in Berea on Saturday, May 2 or Sunday, May 3. Patients will be seen first-come, first-served, beginning at 6 a.m., and as many as possible will be treated. The parking lot opens at midnight. You don't need proof of income, residency, citizenship or any other paperwork.

Want to help?

Organizers are still looking for a printer to produce fliers and companies to donate general medical supplies, such as sterile gloves, syringes and gauze pads. If you can contribute, e-mail info@ramohio.org.

Want to donate?

Cash contributions are needed to help cover expenses. Send checks -- made out to the MobileMed 1 Foundation -- to 2026 Murray Hill Road, Suite 3, Cleveland, OH 44106. You can also make an online donation to [RAM Ohio](#). Contributions are tax-deductible.

Want more information on the event?

See [RAM Ohio](#) online or call 2-1-1, United Way's health and human services general information line.

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