

The mission of Women of Means is to improve the lives of women who are homeless or marginally housed through quality health care, education and advocacy.

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## Teaching MGH Nursing Students How to Care for Homeless Women

Last fall six students from the Accelerated Bachelor of Science (BSN) program at MGH Institute of Health Professions learned first hand about caring for poor and homeless women. Under the supervision of MGH IHP Clinical Instructor and Women of Means staff nurse Elyse Goodman, RN, MSN, they completed their community clinical session as part of a health care team coordinated by the not-for-profit organization Women of Means.

BSN Students Christine Clarke, Morgan Davis, Camellia Dominique, Erin George, Sara Molina and Shavranese Sommerville worked at the Women's Lunch Place, a daytime community center in Boston's Back Bay.



MGH IHP BSN students with First Lady of MA Diane Patrick, and our Nurses Elyse and Evelyne

They presented a series of interactive workshops that promoted healthy nutrition and physical activity in an eight-week educational program which addressed overweight and obesity, major health issues among poor and homeless women. The students based their teach-

MGH Nurses *continued on page 2*



## Happy Birthday to Us!

Save the Date!

Women of Means is ten years old this year and will celebrate at an event on Thursday September 30th.

Call Cathy at 781-239-0290 if you want to help!

**MGH Nurses** *continued from page 1*

ing upon a health-promotion curriculum developed at Brigham & Women's Hospital, which the students adapted to meet the unique needs of the poor and homeless .

"A core group of twelve women committed to the entire program; several others attended occasionally," Elyse Goodman explained. "Participant feedback demonstrated a high level of learning and positive behavior change."

The program culminated in a graduation ceremony, during which each participant received a certificate of achievement, a rose, and a \$25 dollar grocery gift card. The gift cards were purchased with a grant from the MGH Institute Community Projects Fund, matched by a grant from Women of Means.

Women's Lunch Place is one of the primary sites where free medical services are offered. Women of Means operates a busy Wellness Center there four days a week, where a wide variety of acute and chronic health problems are treated.

Founded in 1999 by Roseanna Means, MD, Women of Means has grown from a single physician enterprise to an established presence in the medical landscape of Boston area shelters. Today, a team of vol-

unteer doctors and paid nurses, representing all of the major Boston teaching hospitals, provide free medical care in shelters throughout the greater Boston area.

"The students were extremely well-received, and were able to form a therapeutic bond with the guests," noted Goodman. "The relationships established by this first group of



Left to right: standing: Christine Clarke, Morgan Davis, Camellia Dominique with Women of Means founder Dr. Roseanna Means. Seated: Shavranese Sommerville, Erin George and Sara Molina.

BSN students will provide a strong foundation for further health promotion activities in the shelters."

"Women of Means is committed to educating clinicians for the challenges of the future," she added, "and welcomes six students from our direct-entry Master of Science in Nursing program this Spring."

*[this article was reprinted with permission from MGH Institute of Health Professions. <http://www.mghihp.edu>]*

**Wellesley College Pre-Med Student Reflects on Reaching Out to the Women in Shelters**

Greetings! My name is Christina Sun and I am a junior at Wellesley College. As a pre-medicine student, I began volunteering with Women of Means at Women's Lunch Place in January of this year to serve the underserved women of Boston and learn about medicine and healthcare in a way that I had never encountered before.

As a student volunteer, I spend my Tuesdays with the women at Women's Lunch Place. At the shelter, the women share their stories, their struggles, and their physical pains with me. I am inspired and heartbroken when I listen to their stories. Both the women who serve and the women who are served through Women of Means have educated me, a physician-hopeful, with their experiences. Dr. Roseanna Means and a team of nurses meet with each woman in the clinic to best meet her immediate health need. Nursing and medical students from nearby schools regularly care for the women and serve through health education classes. While I have not yet attended medical school, I have learned from Dr. Means how to take a blood pressure, monitor blood sugar, record a patient history, and interview women about their health concerns. I am also a healthcare companion: I accom-

**Pre-Med Student** *continued on page 3*

**Pre-Med student** continued from page 2

pany the women to their medical appointments. As a healthcare companion, I am the woman's advocate, the system's liaison, and, most importantly, her friend.

But Women of Means goes beyond basic medical care. More than treating eczema or prescribing high blood pressure medication, the Women of Means team cares for each woman's heart and soul. In many ways, treating disease and fixing broken bones are easier than healing the whole person. Many of the women who come here are broken. In addition to their diabetes, cancer, and hypertension, the women suffer from homelessness, unemployment, domestic violence and



Wellesley College premedical student Christina Sun taking a guest's blood pressure

abuse, addictions, and loneliness. And face-to-face, we meet each woman exactly where she is, no matter her past, and strive to care for her, as a patient and as a whole person. From my conversations with the women, I have learned just how strongly the social and economic conditions of an individual affect her health. By example, Dr. Roseanna, nurse Evelyne, and psychiatrist Dr. Deb taught me how to be concerned about the women's circumstances and to be sensitive to the stresses in their lives that may prevent them from proper healing and self-care. At Women of Means, we are not only treating the symptoms but we are also dealing with the root and cause.

My friendship with one of the women began in mid-February. I offered to take her blood pressure and chatted with her afterwards. Through our conversation, I learned that she was new to Women's Lunch Place and came there looking for a safe haven during the day. I asked about her health and she showed me her eczema-plagued hands. Holding her hands, I listened to my new friend as she unraveled her story. She lost her husband six months ago to cancer and was currently staying at a shelter, isolated from her family and friends. As a woman in her mid-sixties, my friend was retired and thus had no income. For three months, she had been searching for a home. The day we met was also the day she was scheduled to meet with a housing agent. The housing agent did not show up and my friend was having no success in reaching the agent. As I held my friend's hands, I felt her pain through the cracks, scratches, and bloody splits in her dry fingers and palms. While I could not give her a job or a home, I knew I could do something. In the spirit of Women of Means, I used what I had on me—my cell phone. My friend did not have her own phone and so, on her behalf, I contacted the housing agency, got through to the agent, and rescheduled their appointment. A few weeks later, I ran into my friend at Women's Lunch Place again and was blessed to see the progress she had made. She still was homeless and jobless but she had softer hands and a hopeful smile.

The highlight of my days at Women of Means is the growth I see in the women and in my relationships with them. While I do not know all of the women who frequent Women's Lunch Place, I have slowly formed friendships based on understanding and trust. From Dr. Means, I have learned how to develop these relationships by being available, compassionate, and sincere. It is my hope that my experiences at Women's Lunch Place will mold me into the physician that these women need. It has truly been a rewarding experience and I am privileged to be a part of Women of Means. By Christina Sun, Wellesley College '11.

## Organization News

### **WoM Targets Elderly Homeless and Poor Women**

The numbers of homeless are rising and among them are elderly women with mental and physical illness. Among the nearly 2000 women we follow at Women's Lunch Place and Rosie's Place, over 50% are over 50 years old and a staggering 8% are over age 70! These women suffer chronic medical disease, mobility and cognitive decline and mental illness. Most are unable to connect well to primary care and rely on us to bridge their health care gaps.

Women of Means has successfully reached out to these women since our inception. In 2010 we have launched a special program that aims to establish safe and reliable housing and improved health for this fragile demographic. For this ***Aging in Shelters Collaborative*** we have partnered with the two largest shelters, Women's Lunch Place and Rosie's Place, and with three housing agencies: Hearth, Home Start, and Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, as well as the clinicians at the Dimock Center to improve communications and case management of these vulnerable women around health and housing.

The immediate goal of the ***Aging in Shelters Collaborative*** is to coalesce health and social services in a highly coordinated and proactive manner around 100 women who are among the most medically needy and least connected to mainstream primary care. The long-term goal is to build a sustainable collaborative structure to effectively serve the housing, health and social service needs of the broader population of aging chronically homeless women in Boston. WoM and its shelter partners are the only organizations that have day-to-day contact with this population, a historical perspective on their needs, and the basic infrastructure to address their needs systematically.

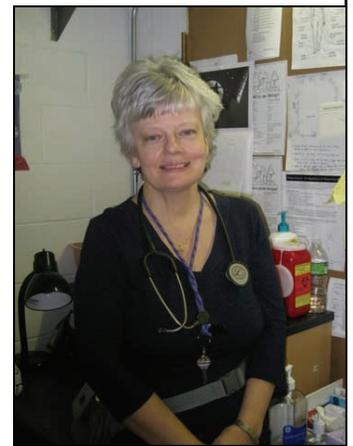
Women of Means has hired a new nurse, Alexandra Vilmenay, who will be the clinical nurse case manager for this project. Alex will work with the women to make sure they have stable housing and continuity in primary care. She will also teach them ways to improve their health by educating them about their diseases, how to achieve well-

ness and practice preventive care. Each woman will have a complete geriatric assessment, including testing for eyesight, hearing, dental and mobility. We are grateful to the Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA Foundation, Partners Health-Care System, Brigham & Women's Hospital, The SWAN Society, CVS Caremark Charitable Trust, Tufts Health Plan and the Yawkey Foundation for providing the funding to get this project off the ground!

### **The Women of Means Team 2009-2010**

#### **Volunteer Doctors:**

Suzanne Bertisch, MD  
Deb Blazey-Martin, MD  
Virginia Byrnes, MD  
Deb Choate, MD  
Nancy Corliss, MD  
Shusmita Dhar, MD  
Heidi Eichenberger, MD  
Emily Fisher, MD  
Cheryl Hamlin, MD  
Diane Krause, MD  
Roseanna Means, MD  
Tanya Phillips, MD  
Derri Shtasel, MD  
Lisa Sweeney, MD  
Adele Uglialoro, MD  
Elizabeth Vinton, MD  
Brenda Walkey, MD  
Laura Zucker, MD



Dr. Virginia Byrnes, boarded in both Medicine and Pediatrics, also trained as a nurse. She has been a steady volunteer since 2002!

#### **Volunteer Nurses:**

Lisa Bradshaw, NP  
Joanna Jung, RN  
Nicole Neibaur, NP  
Mary Nolen, NP

#### **Nurse Case Managers:**

Jane Banks, NP  
Elyse Goodman, NP  
Kettie Louis, NP  
Evelyne Malfroy-Camine, RN  
Dona Rodrigues-Taylor, NP  
Alexandra Vilmenay, RN

## Harvard Medical School Students present their Women of Means experiences at Society of General Internal Medicine Regional Conference

On April 2<sup>nd</sup> Women of Means Medical Director Dr. Deb Blazey-Martin travelled with Harvard Medical students Rose Leonard and Jennifer Torpey to Providence, RI for the Society of General Internal Medicine (SGIM) Northeast Conference. Rose and Jenny, inspired by their experiences with the women submitted “Clinical Vignettes”. Of the many submissions from across New England, Rose and Jenny both had their cases selected for presentation.

Rose told a compelling story of “Emily”, a 62 year-old woman struggling with alcoholism, shortness of breath and a terrible cough. Emily had no primary care, so the Women of Means team worked to get her to the ER where she was treated for pneumonia. Later that month, Rose saw “Emily” on the street. *“They blacklisted me,” Emily said bluntly. Emily had been barred from every shelter she sought refuge in due to her persistent poly-substance abuse and failure to maintain decent hygiene. She explained how “housing is the vital thing,” and here she was, sitting on the corner of one of the most well-to-do neighborhoods in Boston, homeless.*

Because of “Emily”, Rose researched the Housing First movement, teaching conference attendees that, *“After California, Massachusetts is the second-least affordable state for*

*rental housing...Regardless of the myriad of social problems that plague the homeless, providing housing is a critical step toward improving their health.”*

Jenny’s poster presentation illustrated the barriers homeless women face in obtaining care. Her patient, “Ms. AM”, came to the Wellness Center with a skin infection, which had not improved because she lost the prescription given to her in the ER a month prior. Trying to help her, Jenny was sent on a wild telephone goose-chase. She was told by the ER that the patient was *“no longer their responsibility”* and by the patient’s primary care practice that they could not rewrite the prescription because they had not evaluated the patient. For Jenny, this experience was eye-opening.

*“I couldn’t believe how frustrating it was just to get a prescription for an antibiotic. How did they expect a woman who couldn’t read or write, didn’t have access to a telephone or enough money to ride the bus, to be able to take care of herself in such a convoluted system that even a medical student couldn’t tackle it after an hour on the phone?”*

Experiencing first hand the

barriers homeless women face in getting their health care needs met, Jenny’s presentation detailed these barriers and gave suggestions for ways mainstream healthcare providers can tailor their care to the needs of the women we serve.

Jenny and Rose came to Women of Means through their 3<sup>rd</sup> year internal medicine clerkships, working in the shelters with Women of Means physicians and nurses. Each year, Women of Means providers teach medical students from Harvard Medical School, nursing students from Regis College of Nursing and the MGH Institute for Health Professions, and residents from Brigham and Women’s, Beth Israel Deaconess, Massachusetts General Hospital and Tufts Medical Center. In 2009, we supervised and trained over 200 future doctors and nurses, almost entirely for free, as part of our mission to teach the next generation of health care providers to respect and understand the needs of homeless women.



Dr. Deb with Rose Leonard and Jenny Torpey

- **\$1,000** and up will help meet the cost of nursing support.
- **\$500** will support the training and education of medical and nursing students
- **\$250** will stock family shelters with asthma nebulizers and tubing.
- **\$150** will purchase diabetes test kits and supplies.
- **\$100** will buy much-needed antibiotics.
- **\$50** will help stock the shelves with over-the-counter medicines.

Yes, I am making a tax-deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

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148 Linden St., Suite 208, Wellesley, MA 02482

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