

## ODU COMMUNITY HEALTH STUDENTS WORKING TO HELP UNINSURED

Old Dominion University community health graduate students Anupama Reddy and Soji Varghese were stunned when they learned that 180,000 people in the Hampton Roads area are without health insurance. They have since teamed with [Access Partnership](#), a local nonprofit organization, to see if they can make a difference.

ODU's College of Health Sciences works in collaboration with [Access Partnership](#), which commissioned a study by the two students. The organization focuses its efforts on the region's medically indigent populace. Its members include medical providers, charities, universities, free clinics, community health centers, departments of health, city and community service boards, and social services departments.

Reddy and Varghese focused their graduate practicum on people in the region who need medical care but cannot afford it. "Our goal is to cut down on the red tape," said Varghese. "Resources are out there, they are just difficult to find."

The students are in the process of building a database of all primary care facilities in the area that serve the under-insured and uninsured. Their first task was to identify the free clinics and other public resources available to patients.

A large portion of their fact-finding mission has been to compile a list of available health services, along with their eligibility criteria, guidelines for making an appointment and documents that patients need to bring with them.

"Often if a patient can find a clinic that suits his or her needs, the requirements for treatment are unclear, and once the information is printed it is often out of date," said Varghese.

The students' goal is to create a database that is fluid, easy to access, frequently updated and filled with accurate information. The database would not only benefit prospective patients, but also local health care professionals, social services employees and others who encounter the uninsured.

Varghese and Reddy, both natives of India, are highly educated and vested in the notion of community health. Before leaving their home country, Varghese practiced as a primary care physician and Reddy as a dentist. They hope to apply the knowledge they gain here after returning home to their chosen professions.

In the meantime, their research project may help a number of Hampton Roads residents who face adverse consequences due to delayed or foregone health care.

"I think coming from India has given us an interesting perspective," Reddy said. "Our country has such a large population, we have to view health care from a broad community standpoint."

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, lack of health insurance coverage for 46 million Americans is one of the nation's most pressing problems. But concerns associated with access to health care are not unique to the United States.

“This is a universal problem; we wanted to see what could be done on a local level,” explained Reddy.

Clare Houseman, chair of the School of Community and Environmental Health, commends the project for introducing the students to real-world problems and solutions. “This project allows our students to impact the local and world community at the same time,” she said.

Candice Driskell, executive director of **Access Partnership**, said the students’ project is really about building a strong foundation of resources to combat the cycle of health problems that plague the uninsured. Driskell, who has a master’s degree in community health from ODU, said the lack of accurate information is one of the primary obstacles to care.

The information Reddy and Varghese catalog will be used by Access Partnership and shared with local health care and community facilities. The ultimate goal, Driskell noted, is to strengthen the regions health care safety-net systems.

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