

# **A HEALING TOUCH: Clinic offers aid to otherwise unserved people**

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Liz Segulja, a Baylor University nursing student, checks out a young patient at the Agape Clinic. (Photos by George Henson)

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**By George Henson**

*Staff Writer*

DALLAS—The Agape Clinic has no fancy instruments and conducts no surgeries, but Director Charles Kemp transplants his heart into his young students.

Kemp, also a senior lecturer at Baylor University's Louise Herrington School of Nursing, is at the clinic because his heart won't let him do otherwise.

"Life is too short to waste, and this is really important that we address the problem of human suffering on every level," he said as he sat in the waiting room of the clinic amidst a throng of people who came for the only medical care available to them.

Patients come because they know not only will they be cared for, but they also will be cared about.

The Agape Clinic has been open since 1982, but it only made services available on Saturdays for most of that time. Kemp and Baylor's nursing school became involved four years ago, and now the clinic is open Wednesday through Saturday.

The clinic offers health care to people who have no other place to go. Some come with insurance cards, but they haven't been taught how to use them. The clinic's staff instructs them how to use their insurance and helps them make appointments. Others have cards for care through the county hospital, but their children are too sick to wait the week to two weeks an appointment sometimes requires. The Agape staff works through its contacts to help people who need earlier treatment get appointments

quickly.

“That's how people qualify to be seen here—if they can't go anywhere else,” Kemp explained.

That still leaves the Agape Clinic with a full slate of patients each day. The staff sees more than 125 patients in a typical week. Grants, donations from area churches, and donations of medicine and supplies support the clinic.

While the range of illness is great, the most common ailments for adults are blood pressure problems and diabetes-related maladies. Children most often suffer from viral infections, ear infections and skin disorders.

“I just think it's terrible to let people suffer through inattention,” Kemp said.

He has transferred that sentiment to many students through the years. Some of them have graduated from the nursing program but come back to help at the clinic.



Denise August, a graduate student at Baylor University's Louise Herrington School of Nursing, sometimes uses hand motions to supplement her Spanish dialogue with patients.

Melissa Elmore, a 2003 graduate of the nursing school's family nurse practitioner program, is one former student who continues to help.

“My primary reason for going into health care was to help people—to help them not only feel better, but also share the love of Christ,” she said.

Liz Segulja, scheduled for December graduation, sees working in the clinic as excellent preparation for her nursing goals.

“I wanted to work here because I knew it would be different from working in a hospital, and I'm interested in possibly working in a foreign country. This will be good preparation for that,” she said.

Indeed, most of the patients who visit the clinic have limited knowledge of English.

Denise August, a graduate student who works at the clinic, communicates well in Spanish, “but I'm sure my grammar is awful,” she said. While she has had many Spanish courses in school, she said her best preparation for communicating with the patients at Agape Clinic was a month-long mission trip to Guadalajara she took as an undergraduate.

August, a nurse at Parkland Hospital in Dallas the past five years, has returned to the school to pursue a graduate degree. Working with Kemp as an undergraduate gave her a passion for “working with the underserved,”

she said.

Judy Lott, dean of the School of Nursing, is not surprised students discover a sense of purpose at the clinic.

“The Agape Clinic absolutely fits the mission not only of the School of Nursing, but also for Baylor University itself,” Lott said. “The mission of the university is education, research and service, and the Agape Clinic allows for all those things.”

“It is an absolutely wonderful learning experience for our students,” she continued. “They are coming from a different background than our patients, and it's an eye-opening experience for them. They also get a chance to experience what it really means to be the hands and feet of Christ.

“The clinic is only two blocks from here, but it like being in another world,” Lott said.

Kemp gets letters from former students periodically, including many who now serve in foreign lands, continuing to help the underserved.

Kemp's yearning to serve the poor has kept him from climbing the rungs of academia, Lott said.

“He doesn't have a doctorate, because his heart has always been in service, and his service has prevented him from taking that time,” she said.

“However, I can't see how any further education would enable him to make any greater contribution than what he already is doing.”

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