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Med students seek to cover uninsured

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Contributing Writer

Students and faculty of the Florida State University College of Medicine will host Cover the Uninsured Week, a series of events beginning Monday, April 12 as part of a national campaign to raise awareness about the problems faced by millions of uninsured Americans.

The local campaign began five years ago when an FSU student wanted to involve the university in the national campaign and began to rally friends and fellow students to participate in the cause. Five years later, the local campaign has grown to encompass the entire College of Medicine community, including the medical school council, who makes sure that no other College of Medicine events conflict with the weeklong series.

According to Eva Bellon, a first year medical student on the public relations committee of the FSU campaign, FSU medical students have been planning the weeklong series of events for several months with the help of College of Medicine faculty, and although there have been recent changes in the national arena of health care reform, the event's main goals have not changed.

"This event is mainly about the people and about who is affected by not having health insurance," said Bellon. "As future doctors, our patients are going to be the ones who are affected by things like this." Since the impact of the health care reform bill may take several years to comprehend, there is still a lot of uncertainty about how much it will affect individuals, said Bellon, who added that even among the medical students, there are still varying opinions on the passage of the controversial health care reform. For that reason, she said, the campaign's ongoing goals are to educate the public and dispel myths about the kinds of individuals without insurance.

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation where the national campaign began nine years ago, there are approximately 46 million Americans without health insurance, 9 million of which are children. According to their Web site, between 2006 and 2007, it was reported that in Florida alone there were upward of 3 million individuals living without insurance, over 2 million of whom were working individuals.

While the event is primarily geared toward medical students, College of Medicine faculty and pre-med undergraduate organizations, Bellon believes that all college students should seek to gain awareness on the topic as the future lawmakers and voters of the nation.

"Everyone is affected by the health care system," said Bellon. "Whether you are a patient, future doctor or nurse, everyone is going to have interactions in the health care field in the future."

Dr. Daniel J. Van Durme, a professor in the College of Medicine and chair of the department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, said the campaign is a tri-fold endeavor. The first issue is informing individuals, said Van Durme, who has been involved in the FSU campaign since it began, and stressed the importance of increasing awareness of the issues, including the fact that a person without insurance that has been diagnosed with cancer has a 50 percent greater chance of dying from the disease, than someone with insurance.

"Issue two is advocacy," said Van Durme. "(We want to) educate students across campus about the kinds of things that they can do, whether that is a matter of writing to their congressman, or a matter of educating their friends and neighbors about some of the options they have. We are trying to make them better advocates. The third piece is action — get them out of the classroom and actually doing something."

The weeklong campaign will begin with an information session and panel discussion and will conclude with a service day where organizers will step outside the classroom and into the city to distribute information and hold medical screenings.

On Monday, April 12, the kick-off event will begin at noon in the atrium of the College of Medicine where organizers will distribute general insurance information, health care facts and schedules for the weeklong series of events. Later in the evening, a panel discussion featuring FSU medical students and

Tallahassee Memorial Hospital family medicine residents will take place from 6 to 7 p.m. in room 1306 of the College of Medicine

The Journal Club will host a meta-analysis of Breast Cancer survival based on findings from Canada and the United States on Tuesday, April 13 from noon to 1 p.m. in room 1306 of the College of Medicine.

On Wednesday, April 14, from 4 to 5:30 p.m., there will be a film screening of Roger Weisberg's documentary *Critical Condition*, followed by a panel discussion at the SLC on campus. The documentary features the stories of four critically ill Americans from locations around the nation including Los Angeles, Austin and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania as they all live through the financial and personal effects of living as uninsured individuals.

On Thursday, April 15 Dr. Marc L. Rivo, the chief medical officer of Prestige Health Choice, will be speaking about the Community Health Centers Movement from noon to 1 p.m. in the College of Medicine auditorium. Between 3 and 4:30 p.m., there will be a game of jeopardy between pre-med undergraduate students, first and second year medical students and FSU College of Medicine faculty in room 1200 of the College of Medicine

The week will conclude on Sunday, April 18 with a service day at the Wal-Mart on Tennessee Street and at Cascade Village at 1620 Balkin Road, where organizers will be taking blood pressure readings as well as performing BMI and vision screenings from noon to 4 p.m. Organizers will also be handing out information packets about places in Leon and Gadsden counties that provide low cost medical services, as well as health-educational materials on diabetes, nutrition and sun protection.

All events are free for FSU students.

For more statistics and information on uninsured Americans, and the latest on health care reform, visit www.covertheuninsured.org.
