

Interview with PVP volunteer Dave Dvorak, MD

By Dennis Kelly for the Physician Volunteerism Network (PVP)



Dr. Dave Dvorak visited with us by phone on the afternoon of February 19, 2016. He spoke about volunteering, why he does it, and what's in it for the volunteer. He wanted us to emphasize that this interview should not be "about me", but just one example of the work done by so many volunteer physicians.

PVP: What got you started volunteering in the first place?

DD: Like most people who volunteer, I just enjoy the feeling of giving something back. I feel fortunate to work in a profession that naturally has the ability to impact people's lives in a positive way. Volunteering feels like practicing medicine for all the right reasons, good old-fashioned patient care with the emphasis taken off the business and administrative concerns of health care. I think it's the reason most of us chose to practice medicine in the first place.

I also enjoy practicing medicine in different environments. As the majority of my clinical practice has been in a suburban emergency department, it is refreshing to work at a place like NorthPoint¹, with a community of caregivers who provide primary care, urgent care, and other services to a very diverse community right in the heart of the city.

PVP: What would you say to your fellow docs about PVP?

DD: PVP seems to have lots of interesting opportunities, so I would encourage other physicians to check it out and consider volunteering. If you are in a career transition, or if you're feeling beaten down by the administrative demands of your clinical practice, I think volunteering is a nice complement to your regular practice--it's refreshing and has the ability to reignite your passion for practicing medicine.

PVP: How did you find the Physician Volunteerism Program (PVP)?

DD: I came across it on the MMA website, and followed the link to the PVP web pages. I saw that NorthPoint had a posting that looked interesting and compatible with my skill set, so I contacted Dr. Erickson, the Medical Director at NorthPoint. He told me more about the opportunity, and it seemed like it would be a good fit.

PVP: What do you do at NorthPoint?

¹ NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center is a multi-specialty medical, dental and mental health center and human service agency located in North Minneapolis.

DD: I see mostly unscheduled drop-in patients with more acute concerns. I can take care of their immediate need without disrupting their ongoing relationship with their primary care provider.

PVP: Tell me about the patients you see as a volunteer.

DD: It's a culturally diverse population--African American, Latino, Hmong, recent African immigrants--with many being residents of the North Side neighborhood. Many patients might be considered the working poor--hard working, busy people who are also taking care of their families and often active in the community. They care about their health, and they don't want to miss work. It seems they really identify with NorthPoint as their trusted neighborhood clinic.

PVP: Are there any patients you've seen who stand out for you?

DD: One patient who stands out to me is an older woman, visiting from abroad for an extended stay with her daughter. During an earlier visit, she had been diagnosed with a form of cancer, and was referred to a private oncology group. Since she didn't have health insurance, she wasn't able to afford the medications and treatment she needed. Working with other staff here at NorthPoint, we connected her with the oncology staff at HCMC, where she is now getting the care and treatments she needs.

I think this illustrates the kind of service that all the staff at NorthPoint provide for their patients regardless of life circumstances or their ability to pay. It's a pleasure to work at such a dedicated facility that puts patients above profits, where putting the needs of patients first is more than just a slogan.

PVP: How is your relationship with other staff? Are you comfortable there as a volunteer?

DD: The staff at NorthPoint has been incredibly warm and welcoming. The nurses, assistants, medical translators, and other providers have all been great in helping me navigate the system.

PVP: I know a lot of physicians struggle when it comes to data entry and electronic medical records. How is that for you?

DD: NorthPoint uses Epic, the same EMR that is used by most hospitals in the metro area, so I am very familiar with use of the system. A bonus for me is that NorthPoint also uses the same scribe service as at my emergency department job at Fairview Southdale, so it's fun to work with some of the same familiar faces.

PVP: How long have you been volunteering at NorthPoint?

Volunteering has a way of renewing your enthusiasm and joy for practicing medicine.

- Dave Dvorak, MD

DD: I have been there for three months, working a half-day a week.

PVP: You told me earlier that you had met Dr. Erickson on a medical mission to Peru, so apparently you have been volunteering for some time.

DD: In addition to medical missions, I volunteered locally at the NIP Clinic² for about 14 years. We were all disappointed when it had to close last year.

PVP: What else would you like to say to someone considering whether to volunteer?

DD: In a volunteer capacity, the practice of medicine feels less like a business and more like the reason most of us went into medicine in the first place. Volunteering has a way of renewing your enthusiasm and joy for practicing medicine.

Dave Dvorak, MD, practices emergency medicine at Fairview Southdale and the Minneapolis VA, and volunteers a half-day a week at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center, seeing drop-in patients who have acute concerns.

The Physician Volunteerism Program is a program of the Minnesota Medical Association Foundation. For more information, or to sign up for the PVP Network and receive the latest email news, visit <http://www.mmafoundation.org/PVP> or call the MMA Foundation, 612-362-3767.

² Neighborhood Involvement Program provided health and dental care in the Uptown area of Minneapolis from 1968 - 2015.