



NEWS RELEASE

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Charity Clinics Gather to Aid Uninsured ***Fifth Annual Conference of Georgia Free Clinic Network***

Meeting the challenges of the poor and uninsured in a severe economic downturn will be the focus of a two-day conference sponsored by the Georgia Free Clinic Network.

Representatives from the more than 100 free and sliding-scale charity clinics that comprise the Georgia Free Clinic Network will gather April 27-28 at the Georgia Tech Institute Research Conference Center to strategize how to improve and expand services for the poor and uninsured — particularly in a worsening economy.

With the state's unemployment rate at 9.3 percent and communities such as Dalton experiencing even higher rates of Georgians out of work, the poor and uninsured are straining Georgia's free clinics, said Donna Looper, executive director of the Georgia Free Clinic Network.

"With the economy in the worst shape it has been since 1980, our clinics are jammed with patients and many are new patients," Looper said. "At our conference we will advise clinics how to handle the patient load, appeal for additional funding and other techniques to get through this very challenging time."

According to the Healthcare Georgia Foundation, 17.4 percent of the state's population is without any health insurance. That statistic pre-dates the current recession. Many

uninsured patients turn to emergency rooms or public health clinics when they are ill. But to reduce the burden on local communities, medical professionals volunteer at the more than 100 charity clinics throughout Georgia to treat patients without health insurance. In 2006, the Georgia State Auditor found that the clinics that comprise the Georgia Free Clinic Network have provided \$200 to \$400 million in charity care to about 1.7 million patients.

“Especially during these trying times, we are finding our clinics are lifesavers to so many who are in desperate situations,” Looper said. “At our conference, we will share strategies to make sure we continue to provide the services needed in each community.”