

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## For doctor, missionary spirit lives on in Buffalo

By Henry L. Davis NEWS MEDICAL REPORTER, 7/15/07

As the son of missionaries in Africa, Dr. David Holmes grew up driven to help the less-privileged of the world.

He trained in Buffalo to become a family physician but discovered he didn't have to cross an ocean to follow his parents' example.

This city's poorest neighborhoods suffer from high levels of diabetes, heart disease and other illnesses. They have so few doctors that you can count them on one hand.

Holmes saw the obvious: There was plenty to do here.

"The things I've gotten involved with fit well into the idea of putting faith into action by serving the poor," said Holmes, who was recently named Physician of the Year by the New York State Academy of Family Physicians.

When Cornerstone Manor, Buffalo City Mission's shelter for women and children, wanted to offer basic medical care at its facility on the corner of North Street and Michigan Avenue, Holmes in 2003 stepped in to help co-found a free clinic.

In 2004, as Buffalo's major hospitals closed inner-city health clinics, he worked with Eastern Hills Wesleyan Church and Harvest House Ministries to establish Good Neighbors Health Care on Buffalo's Lower East Side. Good Neighbors, where he volunteers as medical director of family services, provides free health care to patients without insurance.

There is usually a line of people waiting before the doors open, especially for dental and eye care, patients who would otherwise head to an emergency room or neglect a problem.

"Hardly anyone has insurance in those areas of the city, or they qualify for Medicaid but need someone to see them through the very burdensome process," he said.

Holmes also has a regular job, practicing medicine at Kaleida Health's Niagara Family Health Center on the city's Lower West Side and serving as a clinical assistant professor, director of the family medicine clerkship and associate vice chairman for medical student education in the University at Buffalo department of family medicine.

Dr. Lora Warkentin, director of Cornerstone Manor, found in Holmes a kindred spirit, a gentle person with a big heart for the underprivileged.

"The need out there is huge," she said. "Three-quarters of the women we see lack health insurance. They are homeless. Many are illiterate. They are often ill or addicted and haven't seen a doctor or dentist in years."

Holmes is the current president of the Western New York chapter of the Christian Medical Dental Associations, the country's largest faith-based organization for doctors. He, like many physicians in the group, is willing to provide spiritual advice in addition to medical care to patients who want it. He doesn't push his beliefs but believes in the power of faith.

"We see in health care a lot of people with messed up lives who no longer have any hope. That's a tragedy," Holmes said. "Faith is capable of giving them hope again."

In the future, he's hopeful he and his colleagues can improve on what they have built.

There are plans to expand services at Good Neighbors and develop a referral network of "Good Samaritan" specialists who are willing to take on a limited number of uninsured patients each month. He's also working with a volunteer on a program to mentor pregnant teenagers about parenting.

"The goal is to break the cycle of dysfunctional families having more dysfunctional families," he said. "These people have deep needs that can't be simply fixed with some medicine."