

# EXPLORING BARRIERS FACED BY PRE-HEALTH VOLUNTEERS AT A STUDENT RUN FREE CLINIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## Abstract:

Students interested in pursuing a career in health care through higher education often face barriers of entry into these health professional programs. Many of these pre-health students volunteer at student run free clinics (SRFC) to help support local underserved patient populations. There is limited published data that focuses on studying the barriers faced specifically by pre-health volunteers at SRFCs. This report looks to further characterize this population and the barriers they face in hopes of providing targeted support for these dedicated volunteers. A needs assessment was conducted through a voluntary survey distributed to the pre-health volunteers at DAWN, an SRFC in Aurora, CO resulting in quantitative and qualitative data encompassing demographics, pre-health challenges, and desired resources. Results showed pre-health volunteers at DAWN (N=51) were more likely to self-identify as disadvantaged compared to national applicant pools for medical school. Qualitative data showed themes were centered around an abundant need for more shadowing experiences and access to information. Ninety-four percent showed interest in mentoring. A comparatively higher prevalence of underrepresented minority applicants at DAWN may indicate SRFCs as suitable locations for interventions geared towards expanding diversity in health care. Notable prevalence of first-generation status and desire for application advising presents a great opportunity for support through personalized mentoring. Limited access to financial resources influences multiple facets of a pre-health volunteer's ability to pursue

graduate education, presenting an actionable need that could have a significant impact. Data collected from this study will be utilized to design and implement initiatives geared towards supporting pre-health volunteers at DAWN and may serve as a guide for other organizations with pre-health students facing similar challenges.