



Jody Brakeley, RN was part of ODC's team from May 2012 to November 2020

“ Our volunteers are some of the most genuinely kind and caring people ”

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A FAREWELL LETTER

Hi, everyone,

I hope this finds you all healthy and well. Because the Open Door Clinic has been operating much differently since the beginning of the pandemic, it's been a long time since I've been in touch with most of you. I hope you're all finding ways to continue to work safely (if you're still working), keep busy and safely stay connected with family and friends. I feel incredibly fortunate to live in Vermont right now!

I miss seeing you and spending an occasional evening with you at clinic. It was a great way to stay in touch with friends and catch up on your news. We shared evenings together doing good work and enjoying the company of others who were there to do the same.

But now it's my turn to share some news. I've decided to join the ranks of the retired. This is one of the life changing milestones and although it's going to be very different, I'm really looking forward to it! I've been working as an RN for an awfully long time and it feels like 38 years is a good time to move on and let someone new take over the reins. Friday, November 6th was my last day at the ODC.

The Open Door Clinic has certainly grown and changed over the years. We've expanded the programs we offer and services we provide, added new staff positions, flexed and grown into what we are today. We have a reputation of providing exceptional care (with your help), with exceptional case management and follow up. I couldn't be more proud of our little organization and am grateful that I have had the opportunity to play a role in helping to shape who we are and what we have become.

I will miss you all very much, you have become part of my life in ways I could not have imagined. Our volunteers are some of the most genuinely kind and caring people and the world would be a better place if there were more like you. Many, many thanks for your support, care, time, energy, and smiles. I will miss you all very much.

With great appreciation to each of you,

Jody Brakeley, RN

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS GRACE, MD

Meet Dr. Chris Grace, MD, the infectious disease physician that has volunteered weekly since the beginning of the pandemic



By Christiane Kokubo

ODC: When did you start volunteering at the Open Door Clinic?

Chris Grace: I started in 2016. I had just gone part-time at work, so I had a little bit of extra time.

ODC: You had gone part-time from which job?

CG: I was an attending physician in infection diseases at the University of Vermont Medical Center for 30 years. For 22 of those years, I was the director of the infection diseases unit at the hospital. It was time to retire and move on, but I still wanted to try to contribute, if I could. I went part-time for two years and as of 2017 I became fully retired.

ODC: What do you like about volunteering at the Open Door Clinic? Had you volunteered before at other free clinics?

CG: Not in Vermont. I had volunteered in a clinic program in Honduras also since 2015. It's an organization called Cape CARES, a small NGO that operates free medical and dental care and provides free medications in several clinics in rural Honduras for about 30 years. The Open Door Clinic has been providing a very important resource for

the community for many years. I think a lot of people would not be able to get their healthcare otherwise, and to be part of that has been very good for me. The patients we see are great, uniformly very nice, very easy to work with and very appreciative of everything that the ODC does. The staff has been a pleasure to work with as well. As a bonus, it's nice to work with paper charts and handwritten prescriptions again. I think it's great that the patients can get all of their medications at reduced rates, and get their blood tests and specialty care for free. The clinic is a huge resource. It is very pleasant and very easy to work there. The clinic gives me an opportunity to remain involved and pay back a little bit after a life of opportunity and privilege. It does me good to be able to help out.

“ The clinic gives me an opportunity to remain involved and pay back a little bit after a life of opportunity and privilege. ”

ODC: Since the pandemic started, you've signed up to volunteer every week until the end of the year. You are the doctor that has been volunteering in-person for most of the time since March. How did you decide to do that, what motivated you?

CG: First of all, I really like coming to the clinic. It's good for me to do this. I think that the pandemic is scary, but everybody is taking the appropriate precautions and following guidance from CDC and the VT Department of Health. I'm quite comfortable working at the clinic. We wear appropriate personal protective equipment and all patients wear masks. I have respect for the virus and I clearly don't want to catch it, but I've been taking

appropriate precautions. I think the clinic leadership has made the appropriate changes to help ensure the safety of the workers and patients who come in. I'm comfortable with the whole process.

ODC: Where do you drive from?

CG: My wife and I live in South Burlington. It takes me about an hour to get down and an hour to get back.

ODC: Since you have been volunteering at the clinic, is there a particular story, patient, or interaction that was remarkable for you?

CG: Many of the people that we see have challenging lives. They are right on the edge of, if not below, the poverty line and are struggling for housing, food, and day to day living. Some of them have very hard jobs, particularly the migrant workers on the farms, that is incredibly difficult work and challenging living circumstances. Despite those challenges, the people that come in are consistently very nice, very giving, and just a pleasure to work with. Their strength and perseverance are inspiring. And now with the pandemic these challenges are all more difficult. I have a lot of respect for them. So anything I can do and the clinic can do to make their lives a little bit easier is very important.

ODC: Was it a challenge for you to work with patients who cannot speak English?

CG: It is a challenge, because even with the interpreter (and the interpreters are very, very good) I think the nuance of language is sometimes lost on me. I'm trying to learn Spanish, but for me it's proving to be a challenge.

ODC: Were you encouraged to learn

Spanish because of your time at the clinic, or that was something you already wanted to do?

CG: Learning another language is something I always wanted to do. I've always admired people who could speak two or three languages, particularly fluently.

“ I take Spanish lessons from an extremely patient and tolerant teacher in Guatemala via Skype several times a week. ”

ODC: Why is it good for you to volunteer?

CG: Honestly, it makes me feel good. It helps me feel like I'm contributing something and that I'm doing something for somebody. It's good for one's inner self. It makes me feel good to be able to work and contribute something.

ODC: Being a doctor with your specialty, would you say anything about how the pandemic seems to be evolving?

CG: I think that everybody in the United States, in the world, and certainly in Vermont, has to gear up because the pandemic is going to get worse over the next three to six months, particularly with everybody going inside and people relaxing personal protection in terms of wearing masks and social distancing. The number of people getting infected, being hospitalized, and dying, will be going up. People must remain vigilant about social distancing and wearing a mask. I think everybody has a lot of hopes for the vaccines being produced, but they are not going to be available to everyone for quite a while. Keep in mind that the 1918 influenza pandemic lasted three years. I think we are into our second wave now but there may be multiple waves after this. Everyone will

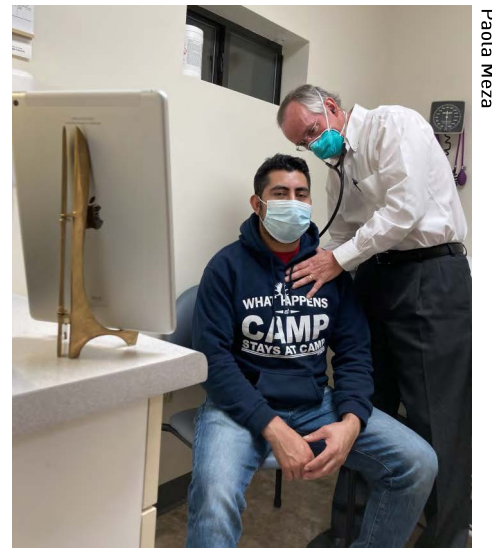
need to double up their efforts at wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Hopefully, as the vaccines become available, more and more people will get vaccinated, and the pandemic can come under control.

ODC: How have you been coping with the pandemic and its social isolation measures? Has it been a challenge for you?

CG: My wife and I are both retired. We have been fortunate not to have suffered the ravages of the pandemic and the economic downturn as many have. We are very aware of the risks of infection and danger of contracting Covid-19. In general, I try to avoid going in stores and we no longer eat out at restaurants. We always wear masks when we have to go into stores or in areas of potential closer contact with people. We have had to cancel visiting our daughter over holidays. We no longer travel, which in the past we had greatly enjoyed. With all that said, we have been very fortunate and are coping well.

ODC: What do you usually like to do with your free time?

CG: My wife and I volunteer at Feeding Chittenden (formerly the Burlington Food Shelf) once a week packing food for those in need. Like the ODC, it is a great organization and is greatly needed. The work we do is very gratifying to us. We try to exercise 5-6 times a week, walk our dog daily, bake bread, regularly talk with our daughter, read books and the news. Over the past five years, I have been volunteering with Cape CARES twice a year. They have not been able to go back to Honduras since February 2020 because of the pandemic, leaving many people in those rural towns without



Paola Meza

Dr. Chris Grace sees a patient at the ODC with the support of a remote interpreter on the clinic's tablet

health care. We are now preparing to return hopefully in the Fall of 2021. This is taking a lot of planning and fund raising. I take Spanish lessons from an extremely patient and tolerant teacher in Guatemala via Skype several times a week.

ODC: Are you reading anything right now?

CG: I enjoy reading historical fiction and history. I have recently read "Stamped from the Beginning", by Ibram Kendi, "Just Mercy", by Bryan Stevenson, and the "Orphan Collector", by Ellen Marie Wiseman. When I drive back and forth to the clinic from South Burlington, I listen to audio books, also generally historical novels, such as "The Pull of the Stars", by Emma Donoghue, "Native Son", by Richard Wright, and "The Nickel Boys", by Colson Whitehead.

ODC: Anything that you'd like to add?

CG: I would like to give a big shout out to the staff of the clinic. They are really great, caring people who are working hard to bring this needed medical care. The work of the clinic is very important and I am proud to be a part of it. ★

IN THE WORKS



With financial support from Middlebury College's New Perennials Project, the Open Door Clinic was able to partner once again with cartoonist Marek Bennett to work on a comic book addressing dental care and hygiene.

Since the pandemic started, delay of care became a reality for more people. With dental offices offering limited number of appointments, we decided to put together an useful handout teaching our patients the basics of dental hygiene. It will be initially offered in Spanish.

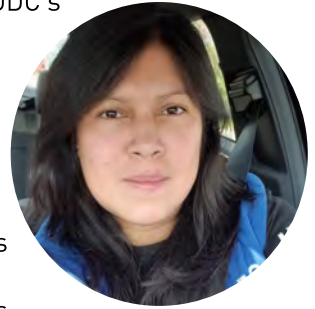
After being without dental externs since the spring, we were able to resume the dental externship program with the University of New England in the Fall, and we were happy to welcome Paul Heileman, our 9th dental extern, for the month of December.

ON HOLD

Since March 2020, when we cancelled our Spring 2020 Training, or volunteer program has been on hold. We are not recruiting any new volunteers until we are able to safely accommodate everyone again. Meanwhile, if you'd like to be included in our mailing list to be notified when we resume our volunteer program, please email odc@opendoormidd.org and let us know. We greatly miss our volunteers!

EXTRA HELP FOR OUTREACH IN 2020

Magdalena Deloya is ODC's very first Community Educator. This fall, she went out to farms to teach educational classes about Covid-19 in Spanish. She was instrumental in teaching farm workers the myths and facts about the new coronavirus.



Originally from Guerrero, Mexico, Magdalena worked closely with our Outreach Nurse Julia Doucet, supporting her in all outreach programs, including leading outdoor activities such as hiking and skiing that the ODC organized to address mental health challenges.

She also interpreted for patients and health care providers at appointments, something she really enjoyed: "Sometimes when I interpret for some of the farm workers, I think of my father, who used to work here at a farm, but now is back in Mexico". Thank you for supporting our patients, Magdalena!

COMMUNITY LOSS

Middlebury's health care community recently suffered a big loss. Eye Care Associates' long-time optometrist, Dr. Michael Celotti, passed away unexpectedly on November 17, 2020.



The practice doesn't plan to hire another optometrist. They are communicating directly with his patients in order to help them find a new provider for their optometric eye care needs. Urgent, emergent, and surgical referrals will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

