From Improvised Flu Infirmary to One-Stop Shop for Health: Campus Health Turns 100

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In 1918, there were few health service centers on U.S. college campuses. Then the influenza pandemic struck.

Within months, the outbreak, often referred to as the Spanish flu, killed about 50 million people, making it one of the deadliest disease outbreaks in recorded history.

Droves of soldiers were on campus at the time, training for World War I, and many became ill, despite a quarantine being in effect. Parts of Old Main and Forbes were turned into improvised infirmaries to take in the sick.

That year marked the beginning of the UA's Campus Health Service [1], one of the longest-serving units of the University. Today, as Campus Health marks its centennial, the unit logs more than 70,000 patient visits, fills more than 32,000 prescriptions and takes almost 2,000 X-rays every year.

"We certainly have evolved quite a bit," says Kris Kreutz, interim executive director of Campus Health. "We have come a long way from a small medical clinic and improvised infirmary to a multidisciplinary organization that attends to the medical, behavioral health, health education and public health needs" of UA students, employees and others affiliated with the University.

The first college health service to be accredited in the nation, UA Campus Health was ranked No. 2 last year in Best Health Services by The Princeton Review.

Dr. Richard Carmona, former U.S. surgeon general and Distinguished Professor of Public Health at the UA Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, said in a congratulatory video message that he considers Campus Health "a model that the nation should replicate as a great, well-functioning, efficient, caring, compassionate health system."

The numbers support that call: 99 percent of UA students say they would recommend Campus Health to a friend. Any UA student can seek care there, as long as they take a minimum of one credit unit.

"We see about half of the student population in a given year, on average," says Lee Ann Hamilton, assistant director of health promotion and preventive services at Campus Health. "College students tend to be a relatively healthy population. We have excellent integration here and are in a good position to address the most common health issues students have, such as upper respiratory infections, injuries and testing for sexually transmitted diseases."

Today, the service, which also serves employees, is organized and coordinated through
interdisciplinary professional health care teams and committees, and uses a shared electronic health records system that focuses on the holistic needs of the patients it serves. Most of the service's doctors are board-certified. Campus Health programs also address relationships, alcohol use, sexual health, stress management, sleep, nutrition, suicide prevention and more.

"Outreach, education and prevention are key here, and that is something that sets us apart from other health clinics," Hamilton says. "We want to provide quality, compassionate care to students, and I think we do a good job at that. We have dedicated, professional staff that want to help and who are knowledgeable about the most common issues affecting our students."

In a 2018 survey, 68 percent of the more than 5,400 students polled said the services available at Campus Health had helped them remain a student at the UA.

A recent trend, Hamilton says, is an increased need mental health services. Campus Health's Counseling and Psych Services unit, known as CAPS, offers licensed mental health professionals, who are available to talk with students about issues ranging from eating and body image to relationship issues and trauma.

Since 2000, the Campus Health Service has secured more than $8 million dollars in federal and state grants, which is noteworthy for a nonacademic unit, Hamilton says.

Four grants are currently funded for projects involving alcohol and other drug misuse prevention, student recovery and suicide prevention.

Campus Health also has a favorable track record of satisfaction among its employees, according to Hamilton.

"It's not uncommon to find people working here who have been here for decades," she says.

Kreutz adds: "Throughout our history, the single most essential ingredient for our success and high ratings has been our people. Our patients always are our No. 1 priority, and if we keep this in mind as decisions about resources and responsibilities are made, we will remain highly successful well into the future."

Campus Health's 100th anniversary celebration will take place Thursday from 3-5 p.m. in the courtyard of Highland Commons, 1224 E. Lowell St. Festivities will include a performance by the Fred Fox School of Music's Speakeasy Ragtime Band, which will play music that was popular in 1918. The celebration will also include hors d'oeuvres, cake and refreshments. Historical documents and photos will be on display.

Speakers will include Kreutz, along with:

- UA President Robert C. Robbins, M.D.
- Kendal Washington White, dean of students and assistant vice president for student affairs
- Tucson Mayor Jonathan Rothschild

Click here for more information about the event.

Notable Milestones

- 1918: Influenza epidemic sparked the establishment of an infirmary
- 1936: University opens doors of new infirmary with 24 beds for inpatient care, which includes X-ray and operating rooms
- 1940-45: Examinations provided for War Department
- 1966: Mental health clinic begins operation
- 1967: A new emergency room, pharmacy and accommodations for 50 beds
- 1978: First full-time health promotion educator hired to emphasize preventive medicine
- 1987: Sports medicine clinic begins operations
- 1995: SexTalk advice column for sexual health and relationships debuts in Arizona Daily Wildcat
- 2001: OASIS Center for Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence funded by Department of Justice grant
- 2004: Move into Highland Commons consolidates services that had been operating in three separate buildings

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[1] https://health.arizona.edu/home
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