

TAP-IN Program to Pair Physicians with Volunteer Opportunities in Virginia and North Carolina

TAP-IN, a program of the American Health Initiative, Ltd, is an innovative program designed/created to connect retired and semi-retired physicians with the critical needs of the uninsured through volunteer clinical opportunities in free clinics. TAP-IN will use its website (www.tap-in.org) and toll-free number (1-877-605-3250) to serve as an information hub for retired physicians who want to learn more about the practicalities involved in donating their time. By facilitating volunteerism, the goal of TAP-IN is to enable retired physicians to do what they do best – serve patients. That goal is closely shared by the community-based free clinics that provide health care every year to thousands of hard working uninsured residents of Virginia and North Carolina.

North Carolina and Virginia were chosen as states to launch TAP-IN because they lead the nation in total numbers of Free Clinics, and have established well-run state associations. Both Virginia and North Carolina have very low-cost retiree medical malpractice insurance arrangements and offer a strong pool of potential volunteers. The North Carolina and Virginia Associations of free clinics are partnering with TAP-IN in developing and refining the program before it is expanded to include other retired health professionals and free clinics across the country. The three clinics piloting this program in Virginia are the Charlottesville Free Clinic, Chesapeake Care Clinic, and Beach Health Clinic.

TAP-IN is a program about people, purpose and opportunity. The many retired physicians already engaged in Free Clinic work report that it gives them a sense of purpose, keeps them involved with colleagues and helps them improve the quality of life in their communities. They are contributing their medical skills and contributing to the community in ways that remind them of why they started practicing medicine in the first place.

The volunteer resource center on the TAP-IN Website facilitates that process by listing detailed information about requirements for the Boards of Medicine in Virginia and North Carolina as well as updates as these guidelines change. For instance, the 2006 Virginia General Assembly recently passed a law changing the volunteer license requirements for physicians who donate their time in Virginia free clinics. North Carolina already has a special limited Volunteer License.

The goal of TAP-IN is to make volunteering easy. Therefore its resource center includes a host of other information of relevance to potential volunteers. The TAP-IN program also includes an online community component that will link retired physicians with their colleagues across the

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country. Physicians can join online discussions regarding clinical practices, new treatments, and other topics of interest to senior professionals in the community. Through the online community, the creators of TAP-IN intend to create more channels through which physicians can rekindle professional relationships and connect with each other either online or in the clinic environment.

TAP-IN will help meet the growing need for free clinic volunteers as the number of uninsured Americans continues to grow. More than 1,700 Free Clinics operating in 47 states are an increasingly important part of the safety-net which helps to care for the more than 45 million Americans under age 65 who are without health insurance. Free Clinics, staffed primarily by actively practicing and retired volunteers, now turn away thousands of patients each week due to a lack of volunteers. Current estimates show hundreds of thousands of retired health professionals in the United States. Many are interested in using their clinical skills to assist the uninsured, but until now there has been no organized program to link them to opportunities for such service.

Free health clinics in Virginia are serving approximately 65,000 low-income, uninsured Virginians. "Despite the tremendous growth in Virginia's free clinics in recent years, there is still considerable unmet need. Through TAP-IN, our clinics will be able to recruit and utilize more retired doctors who can help meet this growing demand for our services," said Mark Cruise, Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Free Clinics.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities in your area, please visit www.tap-in.org or call 1-877-605-3250.

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