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Winchester doctor finds her calling

Dr. Virginia Barrow of Winchester has found her true calling.

Since 2011, Barrow, known as Ginger, has been providing medical health care for homeless patients in downtown Boston as a physician on staff at Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program. A report from a 25-city survey released in December by the U.S. Conference for Mayors placed Boston as the city with highest number of residents living on the streets. Although reports focus on hunger issues, an equally problematic issue is health care management.

"Everyone deserves equal opportunity for quality medical treatment," Barrow said.

Barrow works with an interdisciplinary team at the Barbara McGinnis House, the first facility in the country to exclusively treat the needs of homeless people. The 104-bed facility provides around-the-clock care for patients too sick for a shelter or the streets but not sick enough to require inpatient hospital care.

From the start of her medical career, Barrow has been attracted to caring for "the underserved." During medical school, she worked in a student-run clinic located at a homeless shelter and ran an organization providing HIV education in inner city Philadelphia schools. As a resident, she cared for inmates in a women's prison. She also volunteers at food pantries with her children and works at orphanages in Central America.

Barrow said there are many health care challenges for homeless men, women and children. When homeless individuals are left untreated for medical conditions they can be susceptible to more illnesses and diseases, she said. Moreover, they are vulnerable to crime and injury. When they are hospitalized for ailments, people who live on the streets are released once they are stabilized.

Barrow said that each patient at BHCHP moves a step closer to sobriety when they walk through the doors.

Barrow says she feels blessed and privileged to serve her patients.

"I always try to meet people where they're at, to care for them without judgment," she said.



Dr. Virginia Barrow of Winchester chats with a patient at the Barbara McGinnis House in Boston, where she serves as a member of the Boston Healthcare for the Homeless program./Courtesy photo

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