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## Free prenatal program sees strong demand

### Clinics team up to bridge gap in care

*By Christina E. Sanchez*  
*THE TENNESSEAN*

Dayana Moran believes in getting early pregnancy care, but without health insurance she wasn't sure how she would pay for it.

The 27-year-old mother of two is expecting her third child. Her husband works, though he doesn't get health benefits.

"The economy is not very good right now, so it's hard," said Moran, a Nashville resident. "One of my friends told me about a clinic that was free."

With growing numbers of uninsured people, the recession, and not enough Tennessee women getting early prenatal care, Vanderbilt University schools of medicine and nursing, Vine Hill Community Clinic and Shade Tree Clinic teamed up to provide a free monthly prenatal care clinic.

The women who attend are given a full checkup, blood work and vitamins, and when leaving they receive an appointment to Vine Hill for their ongoing prenatal care and delivery.

"There was a need in the community to get women plugged into the system and get them prenatal care," said Dr. Robert Miller, the medical director for Shade Tree Clinic and an associate professor of medicine at Vanderbilt. "The challenge that we were coming up against more often than not was that there wasn't a good way to get these patients prenatal care, and women would end up in the emergency room when it was time to deliver."

The Shade Tree Early Pregnancy Program, or STEPP, launched a week ago, and Moran was one of the first patients at the Saturday checkup. Moran, who will have an ultrasound in two weeks at Vine Hill, said she knows another woman who is nine weeks pregnant and plans to refer her to the clinic.

"The women were so nice and very good," said Moran, who has two daughters, ages 8 and 4. "I was so happy to find them."

The next clinic will be on Jan. 9 at the Shade Tree Clinic in East Nashville. Funding for the program comes from a \$17,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Tennessee and from the clinics.

Demand for affordable health-care services is so high that the Shade Tree Clinic can see only new patients for the early pregnancy program. Other programs at the clinic are at full patient capacity.

"The number of people who are covered is down," Miller said. "A lot of people are unemployed and have lost insurance. The volume of patients has really picked up."

## Bridging the gap

Tonia Moore-Davis, manager of Vanderbilt School of Nursing nurse-midwifery practice, said Shade

Tree helps bridge the gap in care to give women initial health care until they can get an appointment at Vine Hill.

"More and more we hear from places, 'We have a pregnant patient, she's due next week, can you see her,'" said Moore-Davis, a certified nurse-midwife who has delivered more than 1,000 babies.

Tennessee women have a high rate of not getting prenatal care during pregnancy, often because they don't have health insurance. Nearly 17 percent of pregnant women in the state start prenatal care late or don't do it at all, compared with about 16 percent nationwide, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Minority women in Tennessee are even less likely to have prenatal care. For example, about 41 percent of Hispanic women wait to get seen during pregnancy or never get any prenatal care.

That has resulted in high infant mortality rates in Tennessee, causing the state to have the 47th worst rate in the nation.

The nurse-midwifery program at Vine Hill, a comprehensive health clinic, has been expanding, with appointments filled every day, sometimes for weeks out because of the demand for affordable prenatal care. Federal stimulus funding will help the midwifery program move into a new facility on Franklin Road where it will have more than double the space to serve more patients. The grand opening will be in January.

"We're trying to empower women to be involved in their care, ask questions and get information," Moore-Davis said.

## Additional Facts

### ABOUT STEPP

**What:** A free, once-a-month pregnancy clinic for uninsured and underserved pregnant women. Medical and nursing students and faculty provide services, including lab work and checkups. Women also get referrals to Vine Hill Community Clinic for continued care.

**When:** Usually the second Saturday of the month, though dates vary. Scheduled dates include Jan. 9, Feb. 20, March 20 and April 10. All clinics are from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

**Where:** Shade Tree Clinic, 222 Grace St., Nashville

**More information:** Contact 615-343-8404, press 3; or send an e-mail to [shadetree.pregnancy@gmail.com](mailto:shadetree.pregnancy@gmail.com)

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