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amazed by
how easy it
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HEALTH HERO

Long-Distance Calls

One doctor's cure for the millions of underserved patients across America.

Imagine you've just been diagnosed with diabetes, or you were born with a heart defect, or your gynecologist finds a suspicious lump on your breast—but no doctors in your town specialize in your condition. Imagine, too, that the nearest specialist is 60 miles away. And there's a three-month wait for an appointment.

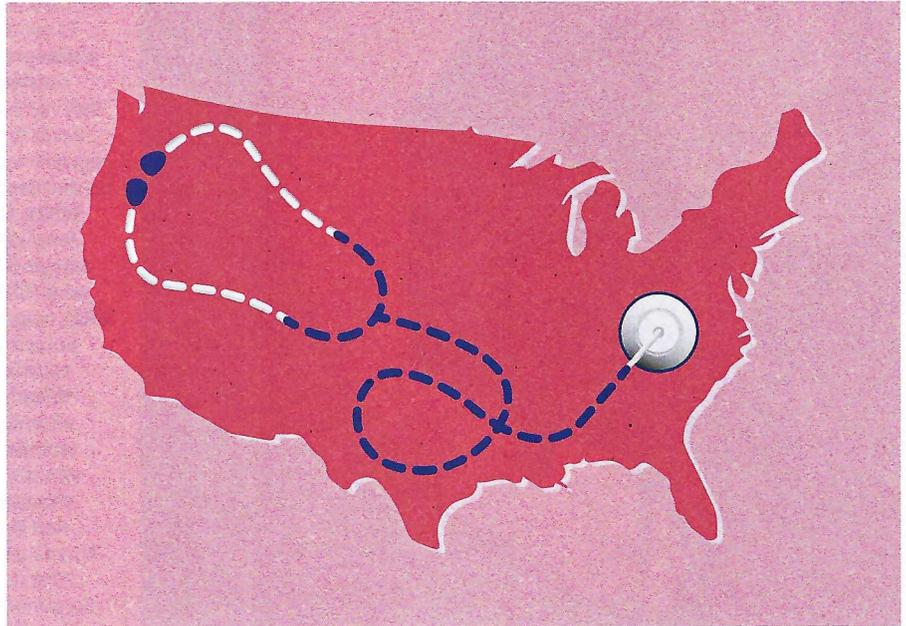
Not that you could afford to go anyway—you're uninsured, and you can't miss a day of work to get there and back.

For millions of Americans who are served only by community health clinics, that disheartening scenario is reality. "Community clinics often have limited resources, and many of their patients are uninsured or underinsured, or live below the poverty line," explains Laurie Green, MD, an ob-gyn in San Francisco. And the situation is becoming more dire, as the Association of American Medical Colleges predicts a shortage of up to 122,000 physicians by 2032, with people in rural and inner-city areas expected to be hardest-hit.

Five years ago, Green had an aha moment about breaking down some barriers to care: "How great would it be if I could tap into the expertise of retired physicians with free time and have them share it with primary care providers in those communities?"

Pretty great indeed. In 2014, Green, who, in her 60s, still delivers hundreds of babies every year, founded the MAVEN (Medical Alumni Volunteer Expert Network) Project. The nonprofit provides consultations, educational sessions, and mentoring—via videoconferences, texts, and phone calls—to healthcare providers at 96 community clinics in nine states. Pediatrician Lisa Gwynn, DO, medical director of the University of Miami Health System's Pediatric Mobile Clinic, is among the enthusiastic beneficiaries of the help. Thanks to MAVEN, she and her staff are able to provide more specialty medical care to thousands of uninsured children across Miami-Dade County. "As a result, we're able to treat conditions that wouldn't even be diagnosed otherwise," Gwynn says.

Today MAVEN's services are available to more than 765,000 patients. Dallas Akers, 45, is one. The Seattle law student,



It's incredibly rewarding to educate clinic doctors so they can provide the best possible care to people who wouldn't otherwise be able to see a specialist.

—MAVEN
VOLUNTEER
DAVID
HURWITZ, MD

who served time in prison for drug-related crimes, has lupus and psoriatic arthritis. "On a good day, walking any distance is difficult, and on a bad day, I consider getting out of bed a success," Akers says. The day she was released in 2018, she visited family medicine doctor Laura Morgan, MD, at a local clinic. Morgan consulted with one of MAVEN's volunteer rheumatologists, who walked her through specific tests to order for Akers and prescribed medications.

The partnership paid off: Last June, Akers was able to walk across the stage at her graduation ceremony at the University of Washington, where she earned a bachelor's degree in law, societies, and justice—thanks to a scholarship she'd earned behind bars. "Dr. Morgan and MAVEN provided me with the time and medical treatments I needed to combat my conditions," Akers says. "They didn't care that I couldn't pay or that I have a criminal history."

The organization helps its volunteers feel valued, too. "Our doctors often tell me they gain a renewed sense of purpose through working with us," says Green. "So they win, the patients win—we all win."

—LINDA CHILDERS



MAVEN
Project founder
Laurie Green, MD,
in 2018.