New Mexico Mysteries

Southwest CARE Center serves Santa Fe, Roswell and more.

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This large mural depicts the HIV and hepatitis campagin “es Mejor Saber / It’s Better to Know.”

Roswell, New Mexico, may be famous for UFOs and alien autopsies, but it was a different type of mystery that drew Trevor Hawkins, MD, to the desert city. People with HIV were dying from opportunistic diseases, and the health department wanted him to investigate. Turns out, he says, “we found some very old-fashioned regimens, and we’re trying to get that sorted out.”

As the founder and chief medical officer of Southwest CARE Center in Santa Fe, Hawkins gets HIV expertise to outlying areas of the state by using telemedicine and a traveling team. Not that their home base isn’t busy enough. What started as an HIV clinic in the ’90s, the center has morphed into a multi-site health practice offering women’s health services, family medicine, internal medicine, a birthing center, a pharmacy, case management, a food pantry and more.

“When we opened the family practice,” Hawkins recalls, “we thought it’d be a great place for the negative partners of our HIV patients—about 80 percent of our patients are gay men—but our No. 1 demographic when it opened was women over 60. But that’s all good! It filled up quickly, and we’ve got to find more space.”

The center serves many Latino clients, new immigrants and Native Americans (Pueblo, Apache and Navajo, many who are integrated in local gay communities but others who live on reservations). And its bilingual awareness campaign “Es Mejor Saber / It’s Better to Know” remains popular across the state.

HIV clinical trials and research into pharmacokinetics have always been a big part of Southwest CARE, but hepatitis C is a growing interest for Hawkins. Northern New Mexico, he says, is a conduit for black tar heroin, so there’s a lot of injection drug use. In fact, the hep C prevalence among this group is about 76 percent, whereas with HIV, it’s about 2 percent. “It’s really interesting,” he says, “that there’s such a difference and no one can explain it precisely.” Hmmm… Sounds like another desert mystery to solve.

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