you’ve got to have faith

nurses extend care into the community

Jackie Sward administers a shot to one of her patients.

their health,” explains Sward, a registered nurse who worked for 18 years as an operating room nurse at Penrose before becoming a Faith Community Nurse. “If I’m helping someone fill a prescription, I don’t just get it filled and then let them go. I help them find the cheapest pharmacy or programs that will help them get their medications cheaper on an ongoing basis. I try to teach them how to make the most of what they do have.”

Another important part of Sward’s job is to offer spiritual counseling. Each of the Faith Community Nurses is specially trained in this area with the goal of not imposing their beliefs on clients but rather helping clients in a holistic way. “Sometimes we can fix the physical piece and there’s still something missing,” Sward says. “A lot of people are just so distressed and out of their comfort zone that they need a safe place where they can be angry with God and they need someone who can help them work through their feelings. That’s an important part of their well-being.”

*filling a critical need

Penrose began the Faith Community Nurses program with one nurse in 1993 and has since expanded it to five nurses. Last year, the program saw more than 2,100 clients and added a nurse at the Catholic Charities Emergency and Transition Services in downtown Colorado Springs. The nurse specializes in helping children and families with young children, a critical need that was not being met by the existing staff, says Maryann Stadjuhar, director of the program. Recently, a baby was brought in who was malnourished. The Faith Community Nurse, trained in pediatrics, quickly saw that the baby had a cleft palate that was not allowing it to suck normally. She ordered a special feeder and the baby began eating right away, Stadjuhar says. “It’s been incredible having her,” Stadjuhar says. “She’s able to pick up on things our staff is not trained to treat.”

Faith Community Nurses Sally VanWyk (left) and Jackie Sward help provide care to low-income and uninsured patients.

The closet in Jackie Sward’s office may look ordinary. But when Sward reaches in, it’s not just a piece of medical equipment she pulls out, but often a handful of hope.

Sward is one of five Faith Community Nurses sponsored by Penrose-St. Francis Health Services. These nurses work in churches and health clinics to help provide care to the uninsured and low-income population in Colorado Springs. While clients come to them looking for short-term help, such as getting a prescription filled or finding a set of crutches, Sward and her colleagues work on finding long-term solutions.

“I try to help solve their immediate need but also teach them what they can do to take care of...