Every Wednesday evening, students from the School of Nursing join their peers from UNC’s fellow health science schools to operate a free medical clinic in Carrboro.

These volunteers are members of the Student Health Action Coalition (SHAC), an organization comprised of students in nursing, dentistry, medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, public health and social work. Formed by students in 1968, SHAC is the oldest student-run free clinic in the country.

SHAC allows students to learn from each other, especially because of the interdisciplinary interaction, and serve the community’s medical needs. Patients come from traditionally underserved communities that often face economic and language barriers. SHAC provides efficient health care that attempts to educate recipients and prevent further medical problems.

“SHAC serves a wonderful and much-needed purpose,” says SON senior Melissa Dedmond, who began volunteering with SHAC last spring. Older and outgoing volunteers trained her so she could start working on her own during the summer. She will work through the spring and train the next set of new volunteers that will take over after she graduates.

Students coordinate and staff the clinic, which is hosted by the Carrboro Community Health Center, and work Wednesday nights. Faculty members from each of the schools accompany them to serve as their clinical and administrative advisors. Dr. Ed Halloran is the SON’s faculty representative.

“I think it is wonderful that the people who can’t afford health-care services can come to a student-run clinic for no charge at all,” Dedmond says. “The patients get the care they need, and students get to improve their skills.”

SON senior Jenny Neifeld is one student who thinks SHAC has improved her clinical skills. “I have really enjoyed working with SHAC, especially in the lab,” she says. “Because of SHAC, I feel very comfortable with my immunization and blood drawing skills.”

Neifeld gets to the lab around 5:20 p.m. and checks in on the on-site pharmacy. Patients come to the lab after their check-ups with third- and fourth-year medical students. She says that her main tasks are immunizations and blood work, both of which involve lots of paperwork.

Neifeld’s night “usually ends around 10 to 10:30 p.m., but we stay until the last patient is seen.”

In addition to their Wednesday clinic, SHAC students also sponsored special sport physicals and kindergarten clinics that were held on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. this fall. Neifeld worked at both programs and says, “They were both great opportunities to focus on specific physicals that together can take a long time on a normal SHAC night.” Shots For Tots, a program to give kindergarten-bound children their necessary immunizations, used to be a special event, but now is available during the regular Wednesday medical clinic.

SHAC is not the only way that SON students volunteer in their community. In November 2002, the SON Alumni Association and BSN students teamed up for a second time and sponsored a blood drive. Senior Amy Brenneman and junior Erin Seitz were class leaders for the event in which enough blood was donated to serve 120 people.

Brenneman, who is on the 2003 Senior Class Board, started the blood drive in April 2002. “I thought it was a good way to get the nursing students to give back to the community that is helping to educate us,” she says.

Seitz and Brenneman met with a Red Cross organizer to plan the date and time for the event and e-mailed SON faculty, students and staff to encourage their participation. On the day of the blood drive, they set up the registration area in the...
ground floor lobby of Carrington Hall. During the event, they helped sign in, register and recruit donors. After the donors are signed in, they go to the Blood Mobile, a Red Cross bus that comes to donors to collect the blood.

Both the students and Alumni Association want to make the blood drive a tradition. “I’d love to see more donors and more pints collected,” says Seitz.

The blood donated by the School stays in the area, so it could directly affect patients that students interact with in the near future. Brenneman hopes future drives continue to reach their blood product goals.

“As student nurses we are learning how to care for patients, and giving our patients blood products will eventually be part of our job.”