



## THE SHAREWOOD PROJECT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

### **Think Globally, Treat Patients Locally Tufts students provide free health care services in Greater Boston**

*Boston, Massachusetts - April 13, 2010* - Every Tuesday, students from Tufts University come together to provide the community with access to free healthcare for those who are medically underserved, while providing Tufts medical students with opportunities to work with patients in a clinic setting. Called "The Sharewood Project," the program is run by volunteer medical students, with the help of students from Tufts dental school and undergraduates from the schools of Arts, Sciences and Engineering.

As the students watch the national health care debate unfold, they want to translate theory into practice by helping to meet the health care needs of their neighbors in the Greater Boston area. Dan Slate is a junior in the School of Arts and Sciences at Tufts and the Sharewood Undergraduate Board President. "I've always been a firm believer in community service and Sharewood provides me with a way of having a positive impact on the surrounding communities," says Slate. "Sharewood also serves as a microcosm of the larger healthcare issues our country faces. While I don't completely understand the healthcare bill that was just passed and I don't know the best way of fixing our healthcare system, I do know that, by volunteering for Sharewood, I can take a frontline role in providing solutions to these issues at a local level."

The name "Sharewood" is based on the Robin Hood/Sherwood Forest idea of giving to the poor. "Sherwood" became "Sharewood" because the Sharewood Project is a mutual give-and-take where those receiving health services provide a learning opportunity for the students. The experience is shared rather than given. "Sharewood allows us to jump into a clinical setting in our first year of med school and get a taste of what being a physician is really like right away," says Janessa Nason, first-year Tufts medical student and a Publicity Coordinator for Sharewood. "We get to spend time with patients from under-served areas around Boston, which I believe is crucial in our medical education because it expands our experiences with a diverse set of patients."

When they walk in the door, each patient is welcomed by Tufts undergraduates who also take their vital signs. Tufts medical students then interview the patient and reach a preliminary diagnosis. Volunteer physicians are always present to review the medical student's conclusion and the physician and the student finish the patient visit together.

Sharewood “reminds us weekly of why we wanted to become doctors and gives us encouragement during the many hours of library studying during the first two years of medical school,” says Kelly Pitts, who works with Nason as a Publicity Coordinator and is also in her first year of medical school at Tufts.

Matthew Shepard is another first-year medical student and Sharewood’s Administrative Director. Beyond the hands-on clinical training, he explains that, “Sharewood allows its volunteers to witness the vast discrepancies regarding health care coverage in the United States. Even in Massachusetts, where universal health coverage is mandated, many individuals still fall through the cracks. Unfortunately, these same individuals are often the ones who need long term health management the most. In this way, Sharewood reminds its volunteers that access to health care should not be a privilege, but an intrinsic right that is the prerequisite for a truly long and healthy life,”

Sharewood provides basic medical and mental health services along with HIV, STD testing, and flu (seasonal and H1N1) vaccinations. Case Managers are present each week to guide patients to other local social services and offer counseling on a variety of social issues. In addition, Tufts dental students provide dental screenings on the first and third Tuesday of each month. Access to oral health care is one of the leading issues for low income families in Massachusetts and the dental students are able to triage patients at Sharewood and then refer them to the clinic at Tufts Dental School for treatment. Eye examinations performed by an ophthalmologist are offered on the first Tuesday of the month and representatives from Mass Health are always present to help enroll Massachusetts residents in the state-wide health care program.

Since it is only open one evening a week, Sharewood doesn’t try to do it all. “Sharewood’s goal is to ultimately never see a given patient more than once,” says Shepard. “It is not the clinic’s hope to treat and follow all of its patients. Rather, we strive to enable patients to sign up for health insurance, thereby allowing them access to a primary care physician who has the sustainable resources to manage their long term health. Thus, Sharewood serves as a catalyst, reducing the barrier for individuals to obtain meaningful healthcare.”

The country is far from resolving its ultimate national health care policies and, while the battle rages on for control over the future of health care resources in the United States, Tufts students are busy helping people get the care they need today. “The Sharewood Project serves as a safety net for thousands of individuals from the Greater Boston area and beyond who do not otherwise have adequate access to healthcare,” Shepard explains. “In this way, Sharewood serves as a place where people can obtain treatment without regard to insurance status, nationality, or income.”

### **About the Sharewood Project**

The Sharewood Project is a free healthcare organization run by Tufts medical students, volunteer physicians, and Tufts undergraduates. Sharewood opens its doors to the public every Tuesday night from 6:30 to 9PM at the First Church of Malden. We offer healthcare services to individuals from underserved communities in the Greater Boston area completely free of charge. The Sharewood Project consists of a

general medical clinic and an STD/HIV testing clinic. We also provide eye exams and dental care one week each month, as well as case management services by connecting patients with primary care physicians, health insurance, and any other social services that may need. For more information, please visit our website at: [www.sharewood.info](http://www.sharewood.info).

-30-

**For more information, please contact:**

Rebecca Scott  
Media Coordinator, Sharewood Publicity Committee  
rebeccamaryscott@yahoo.com  
work: 617-627-3616

**Additional resources:**

Matthew Shepard  
Sharewood Administrative Director  
Tufts Medical Student, Class of 2013

Janessa Nason  
Sharewood Publicity Coordinator  
Tufts Medical Student, Class of 2013  
janessa.nason@tufts.edu

Kelly Pitts  
Sharewood Publicity Coordinator  
Tufts Medical Student, Class of 2013  
kelly.pitts@tufts.edu

Daniel Slate  
President of Sharewood Undergraduate Board  
Tufts Undergraduate, Class of 2011  
daniel.slate@tufts.edu