



**Caring for the Families
of South Baltimore**

MERCY SOUTHERN HEALTH CENTER

Mercy Helps Young Patient Stay Healthy

Mercy Southern



It is not unusual to hear the Kovacs and the Stevensons refer to Mercy Southern Health Center as their "family doctor." In fact, hundreds of other families in South Baltimore confidently put their health in the hands of Mercy physicians and nurses, who staff the Center.

Inconspicuous in its urban niche, tucked into too few rooms on the second floor of a City Health Department Building, Mercy Southern—with its skilled health care professionals—dispenses primary care to a proud Baltimore clientele.

A satellite of Mercy Hospital in downtown Baltimore, the Center serves a spirited, hard-working community of 24,000 people. The frugal, marine-oriented populace dwells in the historic shadows of Federal Hill and Fort McHenry.

Mercy, a relatively new neighbor, several years ago willingly accepted an invitation—from the City Health Department and the South Baltimore Community Council—to help meet the health care needs of the youngsters who live there.

From a second-floor suite of examining rooms at 1211 Wall Street, Mercy Southern reaches out to serve all of South Baltimore. Since May, 1971, the Center expanded its quarters and its services, not once, but three times.

At the start, only about 20 children a month showed up for treatment and examinations. Now, Mercy Southern serves entire families. The staff is helping about 800 patients every month.

Dr. Emidio Bianco, former director of medical administration and education at St. Agnes Hospital, is the medical director. He has also served the Maryland Hospital Association as chairman of its Professional Practices Committee.

A Sister of Mercy coordinates the activities of the Center. Sister Joanne Manzo, R.N.—a dynamic young woman with energy and faith—wins friends and influences South Baltimoreans. Sister Joanne has teamed up with Sister Mary Catherine Kelly to power the Mercy satellite into a trusted community position. Sister Catherine joined the Mercy Southern

staff just a year after the Center opened—accepting the assignment to help develop the initial program of adult health services.

The Center's team of professionals and volunteers daily earns the respect and confidence of the patients.

"Mercy Southern," Sister Joanne states, "considers the many factors in a person's environment which affect one's state of wellness and responds accordingly. Health here is viewed not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a complex network of social, economic and biological factors."

The services offered at Mercy Southern are varied—medical care for the entire family, prenatal services, dietary services, counseling, health teaching, visits to the homes and referrals.

The burden of responsibility for today's Mercy outreach program rests with the professional staff, under the direction of Dr. Michael F. Plott, Medical Director, Department of Ambulatory Services at Mercy Hospital.

Before the opening of Mercy Southern, community residents expressed a need for primary and general health care. They pointed to the decreasing availability of services, mainly because new physicians were not locating in South Baltimore. The invitation went out to Mercy to help fill this need.

The birth and initial expansion of the Mercy Southern Center came under the careful scrutiny and leadership of Dr. Joseph A. Mead, then Chief of Mercy's Department of Medicine. Vitally interested in filling the need for primary health care in South Baltimore, he listened intently to Dr. Matthew Tayback and Dr. James Carr of the Baltimore City Health Department. Back in early 1968, Dr. Tayback first outlined for Dr. Mead the proposal for a health center. The plan was laid out for the support of the South Baltimore Community Council. This astute board recommended that first priority be given to providing health care to the youngsters of the neighborhood.

Mercy and Dr. Mead accepted the opportunity. After approval of the Regional Planning Council, Mercy

opened a part-time center on May 1, 1971. The trickle of pediatric patients turned into a river. As early as February, 1972, the Center moved "upstairs" into renovated quarters—too soon to become too small for the rush of patients.

New expansion plans spread across drawing boards today. Mercy Southern hopes once more to grow to meet the increasing health needs of its friends in the centuries-old community.

The Center has become a town-wide effort. Volunteers—patients, Boy Scouts, Explorers, families—wield hammers and paint brushes when they are needed. Initially, funds, materials and labor came almost exclusively from families and businesses in South Baltimore. Now, contributions are coming from individuals, organizations and parishes all over the city.

More and more families are adopting the Center's "family doctor" concept. When "family care" programs were first instituted, adult patient count soared from zero to 177 per month in just 12 weeks. The Center runs on an appointment schedule as opposed to the so-called "banana bunch" method. This avoids unnecessary crowding in the waiting lounge and encourages a relaxed atmosphere for the patients.

"More and more, we are registering entire families in the health care service of the Center," Sister Joanne reports. "Our concern is not just that the child is well, but that the mother, father, grandmother and grandfather are well, too. We hope in this manner to help eliminate some factors in the community—and in the home—that create conditions which may result in illness."

"At Mercy Southern health care is being delivered in a very personal way," Sister Joanne points out. "We try to keep the same patient with the same doctor and nurse. The entire staff really knows its patients. Dr. Eusebio Gonzales has been caring for patients at the Center since it first opened."

The staff at Mercy Southern—some of its members shown in photos with



this article—works as a team. Coordinating this team concept is a medical director. With him are five nurses, four physicians on a part-time schedule, two nursing assistants, a secretary, a financial interviewer and a laboratory technician. The Center also utilizes the services of a nurse midwife, dietitians and many volunteers.

Education is a big factor in Mercy Southern Health Center's progress. Realizing the importance of the expanded role of the nurse, Sister Joanne and Sister Catherine both decided to complete the Johns Hopkins nurse-practitioner programs. Nursing students and medical students rotate through Mercy Southern to experience medical care as it is delivered within a community setting.

"The fees at Mercy Southern are realistic," Sister Joanne explains. "We

try to let our patients know that we cannot exist unless they in some way assume the responsibility to make payments on their bills. Yet, we do not turn away patients because they do not have money. A special fund has been established to assist patients in need of health care, medicines and food."

Mercy Southern receives counseling from an advisory board—comprised of patients and community residents who are interested in improving health care in Baltimore. The board meets once a month to discuss the Center, its problems and its needs.

The Center also holds membership in the South Baltimore Emergency Relief Group (SOBER), and works with ministers and priests to help people who are in need; coordinating efforts and resources as well as providing referral and follow up for

troubled families.

Only a block away from South Baltimore's shopping district, Mercy's facility is within walking distance of most of its patients—or a short bus ride for those who live in Cherry Hill or Locust Point. When x-ray and clinical tests are required, patients may be directed to the No. 6 bus—half a block from the Center—for a 10-minute ride directly to Mercy Hospital.

The Center provides pediatric services six days a week and adult service five days a week.

Mercy Southern, as a Christian institution, strives to contribute to the quality of individual lives within the community. Mercy Southern struggles to remove the barriers to medical care. And Mercy Southern provides its services with the belief that all people have a right to quality health care.





South Baltimore — today's community grew from part of the original development called Baltimore Town. Adjacent to the area of earliest port activity, it became a desirable haven for seamen of all nationalities.

For many years, there were distinct ethnic settlements — a German group centered at Holy Cross Church, an Irish community near Saint Mary Star of the Sea Church, an Italian colony at Saint Joseph's Lee Street, a Polish group near Our Lady of Good Counsel, Locust Point, and a black community in the area of Sharpe-Leadenhall.

The defense industry of World War II brought many changes in the population mix. Jobs

brought many workers from Appalachia — many stayed and even now are being joined by friends and relatives.

Over a period of years and wars, with economic changes and the loosening of ethnic bindings, many South Baltimore residents moved away. Yet nearly 24,000 people continue residence within its perimeters. Of Baltimore's total population, 2.6 per cent lives in South Baltimore. Ninety-five per cent of the homes there were built before 1940. Home ownership is about 58 per cent and the average sale price of a house is around \$12,000.

The most vital institutions in the community include the churches — 27 of them, the social and fraternal clubs and the youth organizations.

Neighborhood stabilization and continuing improvement are the goals of these organizations. Their members are hard-working — dedicated to these objectives.



WHERE AND WHAT IS **SOUTH BALTIMORE ?**