Community Health Center, Inc. Selected for NIH Precision Medicine Study

Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC) will help launch the Cohort Program of President Obama’s Precision Medicine Initiative supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

CHC is one of six federally qualified health centers nationwide selected to participate in the Cohort Program, which aims to engage 1 million or more Americans in a research effort designed to improve the prevention and treatment of disease based on individual differences in lifestyle, environment and genetics.

The program, which is one of the most ambitious research projects in history, will provide a rich array of data for use by researchers to understand all the factors that influence health and disease.

In preparation for the program, CHC held informational sessions with current patients and with staff and providers to explain the PMI initiative, listen to concerns and identify strategies for engaging patients. Suggestions and concerns expressed during the sessions will guide the way CHC makes the program available to volunteers.

By selecting CHC and other health centers to participate, NIH ensures that the underserved will be included in the research, which has not always been the case in large national research studies.

“From our vantage point, it means that our patients have some of the nation’s best and brightest researchers working on their behalf.”

—Mark Masselli, president and CEO, Community Health Center, Inc.

CHC Partners with CCMC to Expand Services to Hartford’s Children

After several years of discussion between leadership of Connecticut Children’s Medical Center and CHC, the pediatric primary care clinic operated by CCMC was transferred to CHC in July. The team of pediatricians, nurses, and support staff remains and the clinic, which is located at 76 New Britain Avenue, is called CHC@Connecticut Children’s. CHC has added pediatric behavioral health and oral health services to the medical services.

“This is an exciting partnership with CCMC, which is a leading pediatric training, research and service institution,” says Mark Masselli, CHC president and CEO. “We are excited about our entry into a new community and look forward to a mutual exchange of innovations and best practices, including working with CCMC on our creative patient care tools, such as the eConsult network.”

The new site is a recently renovated 25,000 square foot facility located near the Learning Corridor, next to Trinity College and down the road from CCMC. It serves more than 12,000 patients annually with a staff of about 100 providers, residents and support staff.
Quality Improvement Grant

CHC was awarded a $330,502 grant from the Human Resources and Services Administration in recognition of its excellence in providing high quality care to patients and to continue its quality improvement work.

One of the nation’s leaders in healthcare quality improvement for the uninsured and underserved, CHC received the largest of 15 grants totaling $1,829,929 that were awarded to community health centers in Connecticut for quality improvement work.

The grant recognizes CHC for:
- its high level of performance in the use of electronic health records to report clinical quality measure data
- its improvement in one or more clinical quality measures demonstrating a significant improvement to patient’s health
- receiving the best overall clinical outcomes among all health centers, and
- its patient centered medical home status for its service delivery sites

Partnership with UConn and Fairfield University Nursing Schools

CHC is partnering with the University of Connecticut and Fairfield University nursing schools on a new HRSA-funded initiative to provide clinical learning experiences for graduate students in master’s of science in nursing or doctor of nursing practice degree programs.

With its team-based model and patient-centered medical home approach, CHC will be the clinical training site, and Mary Blankson, APRN, DNP, and Jamie Stevens, APRN, DNP, both advanced practice nurses, will serve as key advisors to the CHC program. The goal is to graduate nurse practitioners who are prepared for the clinically complex, high performance practice required in medically underserved communities.
Bringing Specialty Care to Children in Rural New Mexico

Underserved children in remote, rural areas of New Mexico will have quick access to medical specialists, thanks to a three-year, $1.1 million grant from the Human Resources and Services Administration to CHC and its Weitzman Institute to provide a telehealth network for the state’s school-based health centers.

The Weitzman Institute is partnering with Presbyterian Medical Services of New Mexico to implement the eConsult network in behavioral health, cardiology, endocrinology and pulmonology. In addition, the institute will measure health outcomes for the children needing specialty care in those specialties.

The network will link school-based health centers that provide primary care and behavioral healthcare to more than 5,000 students in six frontier towns. New Mexico children face the highest poverty rate in the nation and school-based health centers are a key part of the state’s strategy to provide care for at-risk children.

Need to Be Seen Today? We Have Quick Care Clinics

When you’re feeling sick and call your doctor, you usually want to be seen right away. The staff at CHC of Meriden knew this first hand because they had more requests for same-day appointments than they could accommodate. When they found themselves sending as many as 20 patients a day to urgent care clinics or the emergency room, they decided to do something about it.

“Our goal was to meet patients’ needs so they wouldn’t feel they had to go to the emergency department, which is designed to care for acute conditions, or to an urgent care clinic, which doesn’t have the patients’ medical history and records,” said Amy Taylor, vice president of CHC’s Western Region.

The Meriden site set up a clinical microsystems team of front line staff to review the situation and the team decided to pilot the use of a school-based nurse practitioner during school holidays to accommodate same-day sick visits, using extra space in the Meriden clinic.

The results were immediate and positive, according to both patients and staff. “Patients continually expressed how happy they were to get an appointment the same day,” said Marilyn Allatin, a nurse practitioner who staffed the Quick Care clinic during the pilot. And staff were grateful they had the appointments available for patients who needed them, she said.

“Patients were so thankful and appreciative, especially the moms of sick kids,” according to Suzanne Burgess, a nurse at the Meriden site. Based on the successful pilot program, CHC rolled out the Quick Care clinic in Meriden in May, and then implemented them at six other sites: Bristol, Danbury, Middletown, New Britain, New London, and Waterbury.

This year, by the middle of August, the seven Quick Care clinics cared for an average of more than 300 patients a week. The Meriden Quick Care clinic has seen as many as 112 patients in a week, while the New Britain Quick Care clinic has seen as many as 104. One-quarter to one-third of the visits at each site were patients under age 18. Most visits were for complaints related to upper respiratory infections, allergies and gastrointestinal complaints.

“We are thrilled with the results,” said Taylor. “The Quick Care clinics meet CHC’s goal of providing patient-centered, timely and effective care to patients and reducing unnecessary emergency room use. This delivery of care is good for patients, for providers and for the effective utilization of healthcare resources.”
As Paulina Miklosz celebrated the 20th anniversary of CHC of New Britain with other staff members and community residents, she remembered the first time she came to the clinic.

“I was eight years old,” said Miklosz, whose family had emigrated from Poland. She remembers the receptionist who spoke to her in Polish, the nurse who also spoke Polish and the translator who helped her communicate with pediatrician Robert Dudley during the physical exam. “It was so reassuring to hear someone speaking Polish,” said Miklosz, who is now a nurse practitioner at CHC of New Britain.

Miklosz learned Spanish in college so she could provide the same reassurance to Spanish-speaking patients that she received from CHC’s Polish-speaking staff.

“I always knew I would always end up back in New Britain, and I knew Spanish was something I needed to provide truly culturally competent care here.”

—Paulina Miklosz, nurse practitioner, Community Health Center of New Britain

Reassurance and accessibility are ingredients that have contributed to the success of CHC of New Britain, which opened in 1996 with three medical providers and now is the largest of CHC’s 14 sites.

“The growth of CHC of New Britain reflects our commitment to meeting the needs of the community,” said Dudley, who has been with the clinic since it opened. “As the site has grown, so has the array and integration of services,” he said of the medical, dental and behavioral health care provided at the main clinic, at six school-based clinics, at 22 mobile dental locations and at two homeless shelters in town.

The New Britain clinic has doubled in size since it opened; Dudley said, adding and reorganizing offices to support cross disciplinary communication and true multidisciplinary “one stop shopping” for the integration of care.

“CHC of New Britain provides a comprehensive medical home to more than 19,000 residents, and it is one of the great examples of America’s community health center program,” said Yvette Highsmith-Francis, vice president of CHC’s Eastern Region, who oversees the local agency.

Miklosz said she is happy practicing with CHC of New Britain. “I feel very blessed being able to give back to the community that opened its arms to my family 18 years ago.”