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Community Health and Dental Care

“CHDC”



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good health
a reality for all.

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Community Health and Dental Care



BRIDGETTE MCGIVERN, CEO

By Kathy Hunt

In 1860, American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The first wealth is health.” Over a century later, his words hold just as much wisdom — of all the things we strive to attain, good health is the most important. Without it, we can only dream of financial and social prosperity.

For residents of Montgomery, Berks and Chester counties, Community Health and Dental Care (CHDC) works to make good health a reality for all. The nonprofit health center provides affordable, quality, and preventive health care that is accessible to everyone. As expressed in its mission statement, it aims “... to identify gaps in health services and to ensure access to appropriate levels of care for all people in the service area regardless of their ability to pay.” The center accepts patients with and without insurance and gives discounts based on income and family size. Presently, it has over 45,000 active patients.

Working to keep communities healthy since 2008

Community Health and Dental Care began accepting patients in October 2008. Its initial funding came from the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation and local businesses, but, today, it also receives financial support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Headquartered in North Coventry Township at 351 West Schuylkill Road, behind Dick’s Sporting Goods at the Coventry Mall, CHDC offers primary care, pediatrics, podiatry, obstetrics and gynecology (OB/GYN), vision,



VISION

PHOTOS BY STEVE JADNER PHOTOGRAPHY



PHYSICAL THERAPY



DENTAL

dental, physical therapy, behavioral health and medication-assisted treatment, phlebotomy, and dispensary services at this location. Two additional Pottstown offices — 700 and 802 Heritage Drive — focus on dental care and OB/GYN and CHDC partners with the supplemental nutrition program for women and children, WIC program which is located on the lower level of 700 Heritage Drive. In 2020, CHDC launched a fourth location on Route 100 in Barto. It has plans to open a small medical and behavioral health Boyertown office within the year.

The center commits to providing high quality, timely, and preventive care and staffs its sites accordingly. Depending on their medical needs, patients can choose from five family medicine providers, three pediatric providers, three podiatrists, two OB/GYN providers, and one MAT (medication-assisted treatment) provider. The center also has six dentists, ten hygienists, three physical therapists, and two optometrists on staff. Additionally, it offers medication assistance treatment services that are integrated with behavioral health. Because CHDC does not run an in-patient treatment program, it refers patients to other reputable providers. However, once someone has left an in-patient facility, CHDC provides the person with our Center of Excellence (COE) case management support. As with any CHDC patient, the goal is to keep the person healthy and safe and prevent future issues.

“Over the last 13 years that I’ve been here, we’ve been steadily expanding, and we are currently growing at an average of 300 new patients per month,” said Bridgette McGivern, the center’s Chief Executive Officer. “There is interest with school districts, public housing units, and community organizations to collaborate and set up a small area so that we can be on these sites. My goal is to go where the people are, where there is a need.”

Patients often come to the center through the recommendations of family, friends, and other trusted sources. The center also receives patient referrals through insurance.

To assist as many people as possible, CHDC runs a free shuttle service to and from its health centers from

many convenient stops throughout the tri-county region. Patients who are 18 years or older can sign up for transportation at the same time that they make an appointment. With the exception of those with young children, patients may bring one companion on the shuttle. To ensure everyone’s safety, patient identities are confirmed by the driver before entering the vehicle. Should the shuttle be delayed or canceled, patients will be notified of this change. They can also call the center to confirm the day’s transportation schedule.

In addition to a shuttle service, CHDC operates a mobile medical unit and a mobile dental unit in the tri-county area. As its website indicates, the mobile units “function as a health care home on wheels, eliminating the transportation barrier and bringing health care to community locations.” If interested to partner with our mobile units, please email info@ch-dc.org for availability.

At any of the four office locations, patients can schedule same-day appointments. For the sake of time and convenience, they can arrange multiple appointments on the same day. Weekend and evening visits are also available.

“As a busy working mother, if you can get me in and I can get my medical, dental, and vision on the same day, I am in,” McGivern said. “The convenience factor is what I’ve built all my sites on. And I’ve always designed my health centers to be high quality and attractive to walk into and to feel like you’re coming to a good place.

This is not what you would think of as a place of last resort because we receive federal assistance. We hire state-of-the-art providers and have state-of-the-art equipment,” she said. “In addition, we are subjected to many federal and state audits to ensure our programs are compliant, risk is reduced and quality is consistently improved for our patients.”

Community Health and Dental Care is classified as a federally qualified health center. It serves people of all ages in low-income communities and does not turn away patients who cannot pay. As a federally qualified health center, CHDC receives grant money from the Health and Services Resource Administration (HRSA) to help subsidize its services.

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PEDIATRICS



COVER STORY

(Continued from page 7)

McGivern said that nationally, federally qualified health centers (FQHC) like CHDC have been in existence for almost 58 years. "You don't just become a FQHC. You have to go through the federal government for this designation and the need to provide the services has to be there," McGivern explains. HRSA funds nearly 1,400 health centers and more than 100 Health Center Program look-alike (LAL) organizations. These health centers and LALs operate more than 15,000 service delivery sites in communities across the country. In 2022, more than 30.5 million people relied on HRSA-funded health centers for care.

Providing necessary services

In 2016, then Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services selected CHDC as one of 45 state Centers of Excellence for Opioid Use Disorder. At the time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had ranked Pennsylvania third for highest drug overdose deaths in the country. By 2021, the state had dropped to tenth.

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services designated Community Health & Dental Care as a Center of Excellence for Opioid Use Disorder.

The Centers of Excellence designation has enabled CHDC to hire COE case managers who focus specifically on those struggling with opioid disorders. Among other things, case managers help arrange patient care, monitor and evaluate the patient's progress, and assist with insurance and/or receiving low-cost prescriptions and services.

"Our COE case managers check in with people, make sure that they're on the right path and that they have enough support," McGivern said. "We also have a robust medication assistance treatment program so patients come in and receive the treatment but also have behavioral health integration and dental and medical services. It's kind of like one-stop-shopping in that it's convenient for people. We meet each person where they are so that we can get them on the right path for their health." You don't have to be a CHDC patient to receive support from the COE case managers. If you are looking to reach our COE staff to assist you or a family/friend with an opioid use disorder, please contact us at 610-326-9460 ext. 105.

Care management teams aren't restricted to those with opioid and other substance abuse disorders. "If people are suffering and they don't have heat, they can't pay their rent, or they don't have food, the last thing on the

minds is their health. They need to figure out those basic necessities first. That is where case management comes in," McGivern said.



All CHDC patients have a team to help them navigate the increasingly complex health care system. "It can be confusing applying for Medicaid, SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program], or LIHEAP [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program] to get oil for heat," McGivern said. "Patients have care management teams where the patient is in the middle and there's a whole team of at least 10 people around that person, supporting them."

A CHDC care management team includes nurses, a behavioral health provider who is often a licensed practical counselor, a primary care provider, and a dentist. The team also has pharmacy assistance to help patients with



medication management. The center is in the process of hiring a nutritionist but, in the interim, a care team nurse addresses patient nutrition, focusing specifically on the diabetic population but also aiding with food assistance.

In terms of food assistance, CHDC has partnered with the Chester County Food Bank and its Fresh2You mobile market. From June to November, the Fresh2You food truck travels throughout Chester County, supplying high-quality, local, seasonal, and affordable fresh fruits and vegetables to communities with limited access to wholesome foods. Customers can use SNAP, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) checks, and all other forms of payment. Those who use SNAP or FMNP to shop at Fresh2You will earn vouchers that can be applied to future purchases. Additionally, anyone possessing a "food prescription" from CHDC can redeem it for fresh produce at the mobile market.

Caring for both insured and uninsured patients

According to McGivern, Community Health and Dental Care accepts over 400 insurances, including Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program), and TRICARE, which covers active and retired military service members and their families. An onsite case manager can assist Medicare and Medicaid-eligible patients with registering for these insurance programs.

For this year's Medicare open enrollment, which runs from October 15 through December 7, CHDC patients contact our case managers for help with selecting a plan and understanding the Medicare buy-in program, which helps pay for certain out-of-pocket health care costs.

What happens if a person doesn't qualify for either Medicare or Medicaid? "If you're not eligible for Medicaid, having services at a federally qualified health center means that you're eligible to apply for a sliding fee discount, McGivern said. "This is based on the current federal poverty level — the amount changes every year. For someone who is 100 percent slide and has met the household income and family size, they can come into the health center, apply for the sliding fee discount, and pay a nominal fee of \$20 for a medical visit and \$35 for dental. The nominal fee is because we're not a free clinic, but you're not getting charged as you would for a regular office visit. Our medication dispensary enables our patients to get prescriptions for as low as \$5 if they're eligible for the 100 percent sliding fee discount," she said.

She noted that due to its expensive nature, dental is an area to which people often look for a sliding fee discount. "Even if you have a job and you have dental coverage, sometimes your insurance doesn't cover it all. People can apply for the sliding fee discount and get dental services here as well," she said.

Among the dental services offered are routine check-ups, teeth cleaning, cavity fillings and root canals, tooth extractions, crowns, dentures, and night guards. The center encourages its patients to take care of their teeth and stay up-to-date with check-ups. Good dental health translates into good physical health and fewer illnesses and emergency room visits.

Addressing the growing need for good health care

Every three years, nonprofit hospitals and certain nonprofit medical centers, including CHDC, must perform a community health needs assessment. The assessment ensures that a nonprofit organization helps its intended population, furthers its charitable mission, and is investing profits back into needed programs and services. It also identifies growing needs and changing demographics within a community.

"In our region, the need is ever-growing, and we strive to understand what the needs are in our community," McGivern said. "We consistently try to partner with other organizations that notice the same needs. We also look to contract with small businesses that can't afford to offer health insurance and work with them to provide services. For patients, the first step is to come in and get a medical exam. If children, adults, and seniors kept up on their medical and dental care and went once a year to get a wellness check and six-month dental hygiene checks, it could change their lives. Screenings are there to be preventive. Don't wait until something really bad happens and you end up in the ER, getting a huge bill and costing the healthcare system so much more money. That's why we have these preventive measures, programs, and screenings, to keep people healthy."

For further information about Community Health and Dental Care or to schedule an appointment or donate to the center, email info@ch-dc.org, visit the CHDC website at www.ch-dc.org or call 610.326.9460.

