Community Connections: Heart and Soul

Overview

The pioneering founders of both the Beth Israel and the New England Deaconess Hospitals shared a common purpose and vision of providing care to the most vulnerable of our society. That cherished legacy continues today with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center's deeply ingrained commitment, evidenced in the organization's mission statement: "We have a covenant to care for the underserved and to work to change disparities in access to care." Embraced by all staff as a core BIDMC value, service to the community is not the stand-alone effort of one person or department but rather, woven into the fabric of every provider and staff person's work.

Working Side by Side with Community Health Centers

The medical center nurtures and builds on the community legacy of its founders by forging partnerships with community-based organizations and in particular, with our seven affiliated community health centers—Bowdoin Street, Dimock, Fenway, Joseph M. Smith, Outer Cape, Sidney Borum Jr., and South Cove. Each year, BIDMC provides millions of dollars in support to the health centers to maximize the scale and scope of community-based primary care, health education and social services. But financial sponsorship is just one piece of our partnership.

The centers help us understand the community's perspective and together, we can identify the specific needs of their diverse populations. In turn, community providers are afforded unique clincial and educational opportunities through staff appointments at BIDMC and Harvard Medical School. By sharing these resources and expertise, we are able to create effective, culturally responsive programs and initiatives to foster healthy communities.

In FY 08, the community health centers (CHC) provided care to more than 83,000 individuals in 380,000 outpatient visits in 15 sites throughout Boston, Waltham, Quincy and Cape Cod. Seventy seven percent of CHC patients are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, many of whom are new arrivals to this country and have never benefited from preventive care. Approximately 20% of patients are without any insurance—the working poor who exceed the financial guidelines for Medicaid and have no employer-sponsored health care coverage.

CHCs are outstanding environments for trainees to focus on the care of sick, underserved populations. BIDMC internal medicine residents train in several of these health centers. Thirteen residents worked in weekly primary care practice at Dimock and Fenway Community Health Centers in 2006-2007. Residents have maintained ongoing practices at Sidney Borum Jr. and South Cove Community Health Centers as well. Other residents elect a briefer but intense immersion exposure to CHCs and may work at Dimock, Fenway, South Cove Community Health Center, or Outer Cape Health Services.

In addition to providing primary care for adults, children and teens, the health centers also offer a range of specialty care programs including infectious disease, podiatry, pulmonary, psychiatry and surgical consultations. Some of these programs are also used in resident training. Housestaff on ambulatory infectious disease electives work with Fenway staff providing anonymous HIV testing and counseling services and with Dimock HIV faculty. Residents in women's health elective may work with the Fenway program in artificial insemination. Residents on a complementary medicine elective work

Community Health Centers Affiliated with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

1. Bowdoin Street Health Center
2. Dimock Community Health Center
3. Fenway Community Health
4. Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center (Allston/Brighton)
5. Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center (Waltham)
6. Outer Cape Health Services (Wellfleet)
7. Outer Cape Health Services (Provincetown)
8. Sidney Borum Jr. Health Center
9. South Cove Community Health Center (Boston)
10. South Cove Community Health Center (Quincy)

with acupuncturists and chiropractors at Fenway.

Working in concert with BIDMC specialists, the health centers' chronic disease management programs in diabetes and cardiovascular disease provide effective medical management and lifestyle interventions that result in improved health status and quality of life. By tailoring these interventions for specific ethnic and cultural groups, we can dramatically improve adherence with therapeutic protocols, thereby decreasing hospitalizations, emergency room utilization, workplace absenteeism and a host of other economic and social issues associated with poor health.

Community Care Alliance

Each of BIDMC's affiliated health centers is unique in terms of size, populations served and services provided. To support their efforts to provide the highest quality, most cost-effective services possible, in 1997, they formed a network called Community Care Alliance (CCA) to collaborate on clinical and administrative issues. As equal members of CCA, the centers collectively contract for services and funds, as well as share resources and expertise to address public health concerns. Through this partnership, each center can provide optimal benefits to its patients and communities, and maintain its organizational independence.

Hope and Healing

Debbra Crawford-Simmons dealt with her first two bouts of lung cancer pretty well. "They removed it and I felt like I beat it," she recalls. "I was very positive, nothing could stop me." Then the cancer came back.

"I was really depressed and fixated on death," she says. That's when her doctor recommended The Wellness Community at Dimock.

"The first day I went I was so uplifted," says Crawford-Simmons. "Being with other women who were in the same situation was so helpful. They helped me get through chemo and radiation. They'd give me calls, they'd give me hugs. They came by my house to help me eat. The support changed everything and made life worth living. I go to the Wellness program once a week and it's become part of my regimen, like putting on my earrings, or putting on lipstick."

The Wellness Community at Dimock is Boston's first free-of-charge, weekly, drop-in support group for cancer survivors of color and their families. It was founded by Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in collaboration with The Wellness Community of Greater Boston and The Dimock Center.

"The support changed everything and made life worth living."

Debbra Crawford-Simmons of the Wellness Community

Recognizing the dearth of community-based services for cancer survivors, Andrea Williams, a former Cancer Patient Navigator at BIDMC, co-led the first group at Dimock in 2004. The program has provided group support and educational programming for more than 60 individuals, their families and care partners. The Wellness Community at Dimock is a national model and illustrates the supurb collaboration of an academic medical center, a community health center, and a national service provider organization.