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Walk in Their Shoes

It's September. With the recent heat wave still fresh in my mind and the possibility of rain and colder weather on the horizon, I worry about the hundreds of people who are living their lives outside or in homeless shelters.

In Contra Costa, homeless people are often less visible than they are in cities like San Francisco. Some of them are employed. Some are seniors. Many have children. Many are children and young adults 18-24 years old – what is officially called transition age youth. Many are in a cycle of repeating homelessness.

Our department has a much longer history with homeless programs than many public health agencies. We are one of the few health departments that have a homeless program providing shelter, services and permanent housing. Before we became responsible for the Homeless Services program, our Health Care for the Homeless program was providing important services for the homeless community. It still does.

My homeless patients

In my evening family practice clinic in Martinez, I see patients from all across the county. Some of them are homeless, although I've learned that you can't determine whether a person is homeless based on how he or she looks. Some people who are homeless come in looking clean, while others who are having trouble with personal cleanliness might not be homeless.

I routinely ask patients whether they will be able to follow-through with instructions I give them about their medical care. When we talk about things like the importance of taking medications on time or the need for diabetics to refrigerate their supplies of insulin, I learn who is homeless and it becomes obvious to me that instructions for people with regular housing are not appropriate for a person living under a bridge, in an encampment, a homeless shelter or on someone's couch.

I learn a lot about the culture of homelessness in Contra Costa when I talk to my patients who are homeless. They tell me

stories about having been employed, paying rent, being able to care for themselves and their family and then overnight, because of a divorce, change in work situation, or sale of a subsidized Section 8 building, they find themselves on the street.



Dr. Walker

The challenges are staggering

The challenges homeless people face in accessing our system and getting their health needs met are staggering. Let's start with making an appointment. Most of us call to make appointments. Many homeless people have no phones. Keeping the appointment is another issue. Many homeless people sleep during the day because they feel safer. With no calendar, no watch and no place to sleep at night, coming on time to a medical appointment is dicey. Since most homeless people have no transportation, it can take hours for them to reach the Health Center where their appointment is. Often they will not be seen when they arrive late. Many times, they don't get there at all. Once they come in for their appointments, they may worry about how they smell because getting showers and clean clothes may be impossible. At registration, where they are required to give an address, they may not disclose that they are homeless so our medical providers don't know they are homeless.

Continued next page

DID YOU KNOW

There are an estimated **15,000** homeless people in Contra Costa each year. Last year, CCHS served more than **8,000** of them.

Think about how difficult it is for any sick patient to be discharged from a hospital and go home. Consider being discharged to a car, a park bench or the street. Medical advice like "drink lots of fluids, wash the wound regularly or keep it clean, get a lot of rest," is virtually impossible to follow. For those of you with a chronic disease like asthma and hypertension, think how you would manage your illnesses with no stable place to live.

So far, I've just talked about people who are homeless who are suffering from medical problems. Many of our clients also have psychiatric problems and substance abuse issues. For them, drug interactions can complicate medical outcomes. I see homeless families who struggle to get their children to school. Their difficulties are compounded by a lack of transportation, having no place to do homework and inadequate sleep.

Despite this, many homeless clients are incredibly resourceful and find astonishing ways to survive. They "refrigerate" their food and medication in creeks. They take multiple buses or walk long distances so they can get to work at a job that pays minimum wage. They know where free food is distributed, where to get free clothes and where to sleep that might be safe and out of sight. Attending to medical needs falls to the bottom of the priorities in the day-to-day struggle to survive. Patients get sicker and healthcare needs are ignored.

What we do to help

Navigating our system can be daunting for anyone, although we work to make it easier. Our Homeless Program provides emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive housing to adults, families and youth. Our public health nurses and mental health and substance abuse specialists work together to do assessment, referrals, assisting with placement into detox, recovery programs and Mental Health programs in a variety of settings, including encampments and housing. With John Muir Medical Center, we operate a mobile medical clinic in Bay Point, Concord and Antioch. Our mobile medical team operates a suitcase clinic that delivers more than 200 medications to shelters and drug treatment facilities and community centers. We run support groups for residents of shelters and provide Spanish interpretation, financial counseling for health coverage and more.

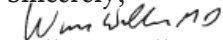
Even with shrinking resources, we have increased our effectiveness and worked to come up with permanent solutions to end homelessness. Despite all that we do, it isn't nearly enough and changing a system like ours to improve access is a major challenge.

What you can do

To improve services to people who are homeless, we can each try to understand the culture of homelessness and consider that some of the patients, clients and community we work with might come from that culture and need our understanding and empathy. We can't know everything that's going on in their lives. But we need to have a culture of humility where we are open to asking questions, listening rather than assuming and being there for them as human beings, supporting them in any way we can in one of the few areas they find care and compassion: our health care system.

The homeless populations present amazing challenges, compounded by the lack of awareness on the part of health systems like ours. This same statement could be made about other population groups with whom we are not familiar. I encourage all of us to stretch our thinking and expand our compassion to deliver the same quality of service and achieve our Service Excellence goals for all of our patients and clients.

Sincerely,



William Walker, MD

Save the Date

Our Homeless Services Program is participating in a national Homeless Connect project. For one day on December 7, volunteers will help homeless Contra Costa residents connect to benefits, medical care, substance abuse and mental health counseling, social services, housing and shelter and more. More information will be available in the coming weeks on our website (cchealth.org). Call Homeless Services Program Director Cynthia Belon at 925-313-6124 or email cbelon@hds.cccounty.us for information, to donate money or items like sleeping bags or to learn more about volunteering. I hope you'll all help in this effort.

- WW

New Publication Available for Employees

To provide a low-cost, compact fact sheet explaining our many programs, a new publication, Fast Facts for Employees, has been published. The fold-out, wallet-sized information sheet will be distributed to new employees at orientation and is available to everyone else through our Community Education and Information Unit. We borrowed the format from a similar publication produced by the Contra Costa County Office of Education. Although the more expensive and comprehensive CCHS brochure will still be available, Fast Facts is a more cost-effective strategy for providing information about our breadth of services.



For copies of Fast Facts, call Fowzia Younos at 925-313-6823.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Paula Fry-Gray

*Account Clerk - Advanced Level
Public Health*

For being incredibly helpful, responsive and creative in assisting staff with complex end-of-fiscal-year purchasing problems. She is always calm, cheerful and has an amazing amount of expertise.

—Nominated by Dale Jensen

Ana Jimenez

*Community Health Worker
Limited English Assistance Program*

For her professionalism, knowledge of county and community services and the ability to make appropriate referrals for patients, always demonstrating care and concern while working with difficult and diverse groups of people.

—Nominated by Kerry Butler

Jimmy Lindsey

*Custodian II
General Services*

For going the extra mile and keeping staff laughing while he does so. He moved furniture at several offices at Concord Adult Mental Health, and single-handedly moved furniture and even a piano to help shut down the Summit Boys Center.

—Nominated by Erika Barrow and Jan Gordon

Infusion Clinic Staff

CCRMC

For being caring, extremely gentle and courteous with their cancer patients, who find comfort and support in these wonderful nurses who always have a smile and a cheerful attitude.

—Nominated by Esther Gutierrez

PACU staff (Recovery Room)

CCRMC

For being one of the most wonderful groups of people serving patients with dedication and care and having a cheerful attitude despite the pressures of their hard job.

—Nominated by Esther Gutierrez

Randall Sawyer

*Director
Hazardous Materials Programs*

For assisting the Community Warning System during a change in personnel. Your insight and historic knowledge has been invaluable in ensuring the safety of County residents.

—Nominated by Captain Kevin Ryan, Office of the Sheriff

Do you know someone who's going the extra mile?

To recognize a CCHS employee, vendor or volunteer for outstanding Service Excellence performance, submit the "Going the Extra Mile" commendation form, available from every CCHS Division Director, or email your commendation to ServiceEX@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us or fax it to 925-313-6219. The form can also be downloaded from the Internet (About Us page) or iSite, our Intranet.

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Melinda K. Flores, Alma R. Toney, Elvia Colemenares, Anthony Franchi, Rosalind T. Hunter, Carla M. DeMarce, Carlos J. Ochoa, Victoria P. Yarber (10 years); Angela R. Pepsin, Maria C.D. Thomas, Odessa M. Staton, Diana Kato, Richard K. Lee, William M. Serbin, Maria L. Ortiga, Lynn H. Silva, Beryl Bar-lev, Marissa C. Uy (15 years); Arnella V. Giron, Vicki R. Smith, Donna R. Wilson (20 years); Maria May, Heriberto Perez, Billie Jo Wilson, Victoria Cleveland, Yolanda Ramirez, and Frances I. Marcus (25 years). (We know there are lots of other dedicated employees with long years of service. Because of space limitations, we are only reporting those with 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35.)

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the October edition is September 11. Publicize your upcoming events and successes by sending information to Julie Freestone at 597 Center Avenue, Suite 255, Martinez 94553, fax 925-313-6219, email: jfreestone@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us. The Director's Report is available online at cchealth.org and on iSite, our Intranet, at cchs.

As part of our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative (RHDI), our divisions have been working on three key areas: improving linguistic access, implementing educational activities on diversity and cultural and linguistic competence, and developing an organizational climate that values patient, customer and employee diversity. Each month, this page highlights what CCHS is doing to address a specific health disparity and what still needs to be done.

Reducing Health **Disparities**



Front row from left to right: Gilbert Soberal, Lee Woo, Toni Philbrick, Derelle Hill, Maxine Larry and Rhonda Choi. Back row left to right: Christine Leivermann and Carla Goad.

New AIDS Cases More Frequent Among African-American Men

African-American men are seven times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS than Contra Costa County's population as a whole. (See our Community Health Indicators for Selected Cities and Places in Contra Costa available online at cchealth.org by clicking on Health Data. Epidemiology reports about HIV/AIDS in Contra Costa are also accessible from the Health Data page.)

African-American women also are increasingly being infected with HIV, according to our AIDS Program Director Christine Leivermann. Of the HIV positive people the program serves, 46% are African-American and 69% are men, program statistics show. HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes AIDS, a severe immunological disorder.



Work underway but more needed

The AIDS Program is working on addressing this disparity through HIV prevention education, testing/counseling and community awareness activities. In addition, the program is providing training in cultural competency and related topics to increase HIV prevention skills among other CCHS staff serving the affected communities. Program members agree more still needs to be done to reduce the number of African Americans infected with HIV. Last year, the AIDS Program prioritized target populations, including both African-American men and women. In the coming months they'll be assessing what interventions are still needed and what needs to be done differently.



What we are doing

Prevention

The AIDS Program uses targeted prevention to provide HIV education to populations at risk of HIV infection, such as men who have sex with other men, intravenous drug users and people of color, said Carla Goad, Education and Services Supervisor with the AIDS program.

Reasons for the HIV disparity among African-American men may include distrust of the health system, myths about HIV transmission and the fact that early AIDS prevention messages were geared toward white men having sex with other men, Carla said. Program outreach workers help at-risk groups and their partners assess their risk for HIV, understand how to prevent infection and know where to get free testing.

"If we can't stop the risky behavior, at least we can help people make some changes to help reduce the risk, such as using condoms and clean needles," Carla said.

Contra Costa was the first county in the state to make sure hypodermic needles were available at local pharmacies without a prescription after a new law made it legal. Our county also has a free needle exchange program that allows people to get clean

Free Testing

Testing is another way to help reduce the spread of HIV. The AIDS Program has two Mobile HIV Counseling and Testing Services Clinics that offer free and fast HIV testing throughout the county. Traditional testing required clients to return two weeks later for test results and many of them wouldn't return. Now, a saliva test shows results in 20 minutes. This test is 99% accurate and is followed up by another test to confirm the results if the preliminary test is positive.

Testing is followed up by counseling to help keep people who are HIV negative from getting infected and people who are HIV positive from spreading the disease. Carla said her program also is exploring duplication of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program, "Social Networks a Recruitment Strategy for HIV Counseling and Testing." The training focuses on enlisting community members who are willing to recruit their peers to get tested for HIV.

For more information on testing, contact Carla Goad at cgoad@bsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6787.

Working with Community Partners

Collaborating with the community is a priority for CCHS, and the AIDS Program partners with community-based organizations and groups for the planning and delivery of HIV prevention and care services. Community groups that focus on men of color in particular include the Neighborhood House of North Richmond, Familias Unidas in Richmond, Center for Human Development in Pleasant Hill and the Pittsburg Preschool and Community Council.

"In planning our response to reduce this disparity, we work with community partners to assess needs of people living with HIV and those at risk for infection, identify local priorities for prevention and care services, and develop meaningful ways to best deliver services to Contra Costa residents," said Rhonda Choi, Senior Health Education Specialist and Planning Coordinator for the Contra Costa HIV/AIDS Consortium (cchealth.org/groups/hiv_consortium). "We provide grants and technical assistance for community-based organizations to deliver culturally appropriate services directly in the community."

For more information about the AIDS Program's community partnerships, contact Rhonda Choi at rchoi@bsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6775.

Send feedback about this story or the RHDI page to Kate Fowlie via email at kfowlie@bsd.cccounty.us or by calling 925-313-6832.

Hats Off to WIC Staff and Breastfeeding Moms

Our Women, Infants and Children program (WIC) in Concord, Richmond and Pittsburg joined other Bay Area WIC programs in a “latch-on” event to celebrate World Breastfeeding Week last month. The program reported that 343 mothers sat down to nurse and more than 550 families attended the celebration. WIC staff and volunteers provided fun crafts, prizes and healthy snacks along with information about nutrition, breastfeeding, and oral health for WIC breastfeeding moms and their families. Marina Rowoldt, Nancy Hill and Beverly Clark solicited the food, prizes and volunteers for the event. Through an online website, Jeanne Conboy, RD, of the Richmond WIC office, got a donation from knitters all over North America of more than 400 handmade hats in the shape of fruits and vegetables to show support for breastfeeding and good nutrition. WIC clerks and nutritionists worked tirelessly in three teams lead by Carol Pedersen, Yolanda Rubalcava and Raz Moghbel to host the celebration. Public Health’s Dental Program and TeenAge Program, La Leche League, First 5 Center West County, and the Bay Area Lactation Association also helped.



WIC staff (l to r): Arianne Lanzas, Loun Cardona, Senetta Roberson, Marissa Oka, Araceli Trejo and Yolanda Rubalcava.



For more information, call Nancy Hill at 925-313-6260. Photos of the event are posted on CCHS’ Intranet, iSite (type cchs in your browser address field).

Website Celebrates Fifth Anniversary

The CCHS website (cchealth.org) has just turned five years old. In 2001, cchealth.org went online with a basic description of most of our divisions, and the site quickly became one of the most comprehensive county health department pages in the state. A massive redesign in 2004 brought the site up to date technologically, doubling the page speed and making the sections much easier to navigate. Care was also taken to ensure that the website is accessible to people with disabilities. Today it boasts thousands of pages. As the site has grown, the public has responded: in 2002 there were an average of 225 visits a day, today it averages 2,700 daily visits.



Nurses Receive National Certification

Betty Anne Carpiso, a Registered Nurse (RN), recently became the latest CCRMC nurse to pass the examination for national certification. Betty Anne was certified in critical care for the adult patient, demonstrating a base of knowledge specific to critical care patients. The certification requires an additional test above the licensure exam, and allows Betty Anne to sign CCRN after her name. This brings the count of CCRNs in the critical care unit of CCRMC to 14. And thanks to funds raised by the Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation, 14 perinatal RNs recently sat for national certification in their specialty area. (Thanks to Beth Bautista and Lisa Massarweh - both CCRNs - for this story.)

Nutrition Network Recognized as a Pioneer

Our local Contra Costa Nutrition Network was recognized recently as one of the few “pioneers” that has been involved in the California Nutrition Network since its beginning. The recognition occurred at a 10th anniversary conference for the statewide program held August 10 in Sacramento. Former Food and Nutrition Manager Melody Steeples, who led the program for 10 years, was unable to attend the conference.



Nutrition Project managers and staff celebrate their recent recognition, from left, Charlotte Dickson, Maria Ortiz-Padilla, Dola Macaulay, Donna Coit, Gwenn White and Angelica Matamoros.

Bay Point Family Health Center Staff Welcome Baby – in Parking Lot

Blanca Adams, one of our African-American Health Conductors, came running into our Bay Point Family Health Center in July saying there was an emergency in the parking lot: A woman was giving birth in a van that had just pulled in. Dr. Greta Perez, Nurse Patty Valdepena and CMA Danira Oseguera quickly sprang into action, putting together the emergency equipment needed to assist the mother, who had been driven there by friends. Health Center Manager Connie James said Dr. Perez and the nursing staff did an incredible job of helping the mom complete the delivery of her baby and afterbirth before the paramedics were able to arrive. Other staff also helped out by providing blankets and other items to welcome the new baby. “It was the first Bay Point Family Health Center baby ever born in our parking lot,” Connie said. “Great job to medical staff and all the staff who truly supported the mother and new baby.”



Danira Oseguera, Patricia Valdepena and Dr. Greta Perez, from left, helped delivery a baby in the parking lot of Bay Point Health Center.

Smart Snacks contain

- ★ Not more than 35% calories from fat (except nuts/seeds)
- ★ Not more than 10% calories from saturated fat
- ★ No trans fats
- ★ Not more than 35% weight from sugar



Los Bocados Inteligentes contienen

- ★ No más de 35% calorías de grasa (excluyendo nueces/semillas)
- ★ No más de 10% calorías de grasa saturada
- ★ Nada de grasas trans
- ★ No más de 35% peso total de azúcar

For healthier vending machine choices, contact the company or the phone number on the machine. Para elecciones saludables en vendedores automáticos, contacte a la compañía vendedora o llame al número de contacto en la máquina.



County Vending Machine Policy Update

Thanks to vending machine guidelines approved by the Board of Supervisors in 2004, half the items in vending machines in County-owned or leased buildings must be food items that are lower in fat, sodium and sugar than most snack foods, and beverages such as water, lowfat milk and fruit juices. This summer, suppliers of those vending machines have been posting a new bilingual sign, “Smart Choices Made Easy (Selecciones Inteligentes Hechas Fácil),” directing consumers to the healthier items which are marked by a green star. Staff of our Community Wellness & Prevention Program’s (CW&PP) Nutrition Project will check vending machines and interview consumers to determine how compliance is going and how well people understand the policy.



For more information, contact Charlotte Dickson, CW&PP’s Obesity and Diabetes Prevention Coordinator, at cdickson@bsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6217.

Smart snacks vending machine poster.

Resources for Pregnant and Parenting Women Online

The Perinatal Substance Abuse Partnership (PSAP), a collaborative of county and community-based agencies, held a meeting in 2005 with policy-makers throughout the county to discuss plans for developing a seamless system of prevention, intervention, education and treatment services for pregnant women, parents, children, adolescents, and families in Contra Costa who have been affected by alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. One recommendation that came out of this meeting was to create a map of agencies and/or programs that provide services to pregnant and parenting substance using clients. Working with Mary Margaret Clark of the Contra Costa Crisis Center, which oversees the Contra Costa Online Resource Database (CORD), and Suzzette Johnson of our Family, Maternal and Child Health Program, PSAP created a new target group for the searchable online database. Visit www.cccord.org to check it out. The site also features regional guides for selected services for CORD’s whole database of more than 2,000 local organizations and agencies.



Call Suzzette Johnson at 925-313-6258 for more information about CORD’s perinatal services information.

Sirlura Taylor Appointed to National Council

Sirlura Taylor, our Tuberculosis/Communicable Disease Programs Manager, has been appointed to the Center for Disease Control Advisory Council for Elimination of Tuberculosis. Sirlura is the first and only nurse on this national committee, which reviews TB issues nationally. It assists states in preventing and containing communicable disease and promoting health. The Council meets four times a year in Atlanta. Sirlura has worked for Health Services for 21 years in a TB/Communicable Disease leadership role.



Sirlura Taylor




Among those happy to have the new ultrasound unit at CCRMC are, from left, Ray Ulmar, Auxiliary President; Doris Greene, Co-manager, Gift Shop; Pat Ulmar, Fundraiser; Don Dominquez, Critical Care RN; and Marietta Ciriaco, Critical Care RN.

Auxiliary Donation Helps Buy ICU Machine

Our CCRMC Auxiliary volunteers recently donated \$15,000 to help purchase a new portable ultrasound unit for the Intensive Care Unit. Resembling a lightweight laptop computer, the machine reduces complications and improves patient care. The Auxiliary raised the money, which paid for half the machine, through fund-raising and gift shop proceeds.

New Online Restaurant Information

Curious about how your favorite restaurant did on recent inspections by our Environmental Health Program? A new searchable feature on our website has just been launched showing violations of State standards. There are 4,007 food facilities in the database and inspection results will be updated weekly. Violations are marked major or minor. If a facility has to be closed for major violations, the re-opening date will be shown. EH Specialist Vanessa Cordier completed the database project under the supervision of EH Assistant Director Richard Lee.

 To use the Food Facility Inspection Information, visit cchealth.org and look for the link in Items of Interest. For more information, call 925-646-9225.

Fall is the Time for Open Enrollment in Our Health Plan

County employees have a chance this fall to join our Contra Costa Health Plan (CCHP), one of the fastest growing HMOs in the Bay Area. Currently, more than 9,000 members are County employees and their families. CCHP has two health plan options for permanent employees. Plan A members are treated at our eight local Health Centers across the County and at the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. Members choosing Plan B have a choice between hundreds of community or County doctors and can use contracted community hospitals. Member co-payments for both plan options are the lowest of any of the County-offered health plans. CCHP also offers coverage for permanent intermittent and temporary County employees in our A2 plan.

 For more information about Contra Costa Health Plan and open enrollment, call the County Benefits Office at 925-335-1746. For information about the A2 plan, call 1-800-211-8040.