Celebrating 22 Years of Service to the Uninsured

This year, our annual Celebration of Care Gala was held on April 16th, 2015, in The Radisson Blu Aqua Atlantic Ballroom. More than 300 guests attended and helped raise over $400,000 in support of CommunityHealth.

Event sponsors included: Baxter, Joseph & Bessie Feinberg Foundation, Lundbeck, BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois, Neal Gerber & Eisenberg, AstraZeneca, Catamaran, AbbVie, Advocate Health Care, Aetna, Astellas USA Foundation, University of Chicago Medicine, Walgreens, and many more.

Our Visionary Award was presented to Rebekah Kohmescher, who has volunteered with CommunityHealth for over 15 years. She has assisted with managing clinic finances and implementing the accounting software the health center uses to this day. Rebekah currently serves as Board Treasurer.

We were pleased to present our inaugural Corporations that Care Award to Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg LLP, whose employees have been providing pro bono counsel to CommunityHealth since 2009.

Former patient Greg Van Hyfte shared his personal story of how CommunityHealth provided him with care when he did not have insurance. While still a patient, Greg also volunteered to teach a special yoga class designed for individuals suffering from lower back pain, and he spoke about how his experiences building up the yoga program at CommunityHealth inspired him to continue teaching yoga in Chicago.

Guests participated in an open appeal, Heads or Tails, a wine pull, and a live auction with prizes ranging from an exclusive golf getaway in Michigan to an incredible painting of former Bears Head Coach Mike Ditka by local artist Elliott From.

We are so grateful to all that attended and contributed to making this year’s Celebration of Care a truly wonderful event!
Patients Enjoy Nutrition Day Events

The month of May brought dozens of community members and patients eager to learn about the various ways they can improve their diets to our two health centers for Nutrition Day.

At the events, there were discussions about the benefit of setting goals and keeping food diaries, which were provided to all participants. Attendees learned how many servings of each food group are recommended each day and talked about the barriers they face to following these guidelines. For example, many struggle with finding fresh fruits and vegetables in their communities. Participants openly discussed this problem, shared stories, and provided examples of various locations they can go to get the food that they need.

There was also a discussion regarding portion control and how to measure a serving size. Finally, attendees made their own ranch, honey-lime, and basil pesto salad dressings and learned how to prepare it at home, too, to help make eating salads more exciting. Everyone was impressed by how delicious and healthy their homemade dressings were compared to ones they normally purchased!

CommunityHealth offers several classes on cooking and healthy eating, utilizing Share Our Strength’s “Cooking Matters” curriculum. With many of our patients dealing with diabetes and cardiovascular issues, CommunityHealth focuses not just on the treatment of existing conditions, but also on the prevention of further illness through good nutrition. From the classes CommunityHealth offers, individuals are able to take what they learn and apply it at home, sharing the importance of healthy eating with their children and other family members.

Why did you begin volunteering at CommunityHealth?
I came to CommunityHealth because I wanted to have a hands-on experience with helping people in my community.

Do you remember your first day? What surprised you?
On my first day, I was nervous about messing up a blood glucose test and having to do it over. When I was walking that patient over to the orange chairs, I passed out! When I came to, I was on the floor with the patient standing over me and a doctor taking my pulse. It was surprising that even though I had practiced and felt good about taking a blood glucose test on my peers in training, when it came to the real deal, I didn’t realize I would be so nervous about hurting the patient and causing him discomfort.

What has kept you volunteering all this time?
I think that, being in triage, volunteers have the ability to set the tone of a patient’s visit. If they have a good experience with you, you make their visit less stressful. A lot of the time, patients come in nervous, worried, or scared. By being friendly, welcoming and reassuring, triage volunteers can help ease their stress and make their overall experience easier just by smiling and talking to them. Being able to make someone’s day better and help them out brightens my day.

What is something that not a lot of people know about you but you wish more people could know?
I have always been fascinated with space since I was a little kid and wanted to be an astronomer at NASA to look for life on Mars. Although my goals have changed a bit since then, I now aspire to be a NASA Flight Surgeon and study space medicine. I want to be able to contribute to the space industry and be able to help make human expansion into space possible. I’ve now been accepted for my dream internship - studying the lifetime surveillance of astronaut health in the Space Medicine Division at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

Volunteer Marta Majcherska taught patients to make their own salad dressing.
CommunityHealth Hosts New Coptic Clinic

On Saturdays, CommunityHealth is buzzing with activity; patients stepping on and off the scale, blood pressures being taken, and prescriptions being filled. But if you look closer, you may notice a very special addition to our clinic offerings occurring: CommunityHealth now provides a Coptic clinic for patients at the West Town clinic. This clinic operates every Saturday with both Coptic volunteers and patients. The Coptic clinic is yet another illustration of CommunityHealth’s commitment to identifying and caring for the underserved in an environment that is both linguistically and culturally sensitive.

The English word copt is taken from an Arabic word meaning “Egyptian.” Today, Coptic refers specifically to Egyptian Christians. There are over 18 million Coptic Christians in the world, with hundreds of thousands living in the United States. In the past 40 years, Chicago has seen an increase of Coptic immigrants with the development of three new Coptic churches since the 1970’s.

The relationship between CommunityHealth and the Coptic community began after Mina Kerolos, a member of the Coptic community, began volunteering as a pharmacist with CommunityHealth and saw the opportunity for serving others within his community. He was able to recruit other volunteers within the Coptic community, like Dr. Joseph Yacoub, who works as a volunteer physician at the clinic. Dr. Yacoub explains the need for care within the Coptic community, “In the past 5 to 10 years, more and more immigrants have moved to Chicago, and conditions for these individuals are not great. Medical needs are not being met, and there are few places that people know of to go.”

Dr. Yacoub goes on to explain that Mina began the conversation about the clinic with people at local Coptic churches, and that CommunityHealth was very open to the idea of starting such a unique clinic.

“As medical professionals, we believe that we have a blessing to share to an underserved population, and we are very willing to work.” Mina was able to do outreach of his own to register patients before they even came to the clinic, because most of the Coptic patients do not live close to either of CommunityHealth’s locations (most reside in the suburbs). Their efforts were quite successful: “Mina was able to register 60 patients within the first month of the clinic opening,” Dr. Yacoub explains.

The Coptic clinic is continuing to grow with each passing Saturday. The hard work that Mina, Joseph, and other volunteers have put into developing this clinic is a further testament to the breadth and depth of care at CommunityHealth, made possible by private donations and passionate volunteers. CommunityHealth is honored to fulfill our mission by caring for yet another underserved population within the city of Chicago.
Paso a Paso Keeps Women Healthy Through Art and Fellowship

Magdalena, Graciela and Luz sit together, carefully tracing flower petals on the papers in front of them. Occasionally, one of them will blurt something out in Spanish, causing an eruption of laughter from the group and several hands slapping the table. These women are all part of a women’s health group called Paso a Paso that meets twice a month at CommunityHealth. Paso a Paso and other Health Education programming at CommunityHealth are open to the public, although most attendees are current/former patients and their families. The group offers a safe space for these women to share stories and food while using artistic expression as a form of therapy.

Magdalena is the youngest of the group and has been a patient with CommunityHealth for almost four years. She lost the health insurance coverage that her job provided when the number of hours she was working decreased. Magdalena is diabetic and needs to take medication every day to manage her illness. Friends in her neighborhood told her about CommunityHealth, and she was immediately drawn to the clinic, not just for the free health services, but also for the classes that were offered.

Magdalena has lived in Chicago for almost 35 years. She raised her children here and has grown to consider the city her home after moving from Mexico City. Her children are older now and live in different cities throughout the country. Paso a Paso helps her cope with her depression and has provided her with lifelong friends. “I am able to socialize here. We all share similar experiences, we are able to tell each other our ideas and our problems.”

Graciela shares a similar story. She moved to Chicago 24 years ago from Jalisco, Mexico, and needed to find a free healthcare clinic that would help her understand some physical symptoms she was having. CommunityHealth diagnosed Graciela with diabetes and high cholesterol and started her on medication, helping treat both of these conditions. Graciela became a patient and has been treated for both diabetes and hypertension. She says, “All of us women walk together from our neighborhood to CommunityHealth. It has really helped my hypertension.” Luz says that they have been walking to the West Town clinic for two years now, allowing the women to socialize more, which helps Luz cope with her depression. “They treat me very well here. I am going to be able to receive Medicare soon, and I do not want to leave CommunityHealth.” She pauses, sad. “They have good coffee here.”

Suddenly, Luz is no longer the quiet one, as her booming laughter fills the room. The women all hold their hands to their chest, laughing with one another. They stop to look at each other, and Magdalena shakes her head, “I am very lucky to have met these women.” And she thanks CommunityHealth for bringing them all together.