

Case Study: The Martin Luther King (MLK) Health Center

Shreveport, Louisiana

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Managing Chronic Disease through Prevention and an Innovative Care Delivery Model in a Charitable Health Center and Pharmacy

With its tagline “Good Health is Contagious... Catch Some,” the Martin Luther King (MLK) Health Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, a longtime partner of AmeriCares U.S. Medical Assistance Program, strives to make an impact on the wellness of their community and the people they serve through group medical visits and patient-centered care. A recent visit by AmeriCares staff, chronicled in this case study, highlights the innovative care delivery model implemented by their center to address chronic disease and improve the health of their patients.

About the Martin Luther King Health Center

The Martin Luther King Health Center, located in Shreveport, Louisiana, is a free/ charitable health center and pharmacy that serves more than 1,000 low-income, uninsured and underinsured patients a year, many of them with chronic disease. They were founded in 1985 by LSUHSC School of Medicine Resident, Dr. Robert H. Jackson and the late Sister Margaret McCaffery. The center serves as a safety net for patients that do not have the resources to obtain quality health care and needed medications. They play an important role in Louisiana’s medical history by holding the first Charitable Pharmacy permit issued by the Louisiana Board of Pharmacy. Today, the center and pharmacy provide services to people in their community valued at over \$14 million a year.

Annual Budget: \$600,000

Annual Patient Visits: 4,000

Number Paid Staff: 7 full-time, 3 part-time

Number Volunteers: 50-100 volunteers

Leadership: 17-member Board of Directors, Medical Director, Executive Director, Pharmacist

Services Provided:

- Primary healthcare, laboratory and pharmacy services
- Patient advocacy
- Diabetic, Respiratory, Cardiac and HIV Specialty Clinics/ Group Visits
- STI/ HIV testing & counseling
- Women’s health program – clinical breast exams and PAP tests for women 21 and older; mammography for women over 40; screening service navigation for individuals with insurance
- Mobile rural outreach in the surrounding areas
- Medicaid, Medicare and Affordable Care Act education and enrollment
- Diabetes Prevention Program classes
- Wellness Programs
- Night and weekend appointments
- English and Spanish services
- Geriatric Specialty Clinic

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Background

Diabetes, heart disease and other chronic medical conditions are costly, requiring medication and multiple checkups each year and are especially prevalent for those that lack health insurance and often, access to adequate health care. Many of the risk factors contributing to these conditions are preventable through lifestyle changes; this is prompting health care providers across the country to rethink their approach to chronic disease care, prevention and patient engagement.

The Martin Luther King Health Center has recognized this shift and adopted a unique scheduling and innovative care delivery model that promotes access, continuity of care and a true patient-centered approach. They have also implemented a diabetes prevention program targeting patients at-risk for developing type 2 diabetes. They provide a great example of the quality of care being provided by free clinics in our country, a critical sector of the U.S. safety net.

Innovative Care Delivery Model

One step into the MLK Health Center waiting room, adorned with murals painted by local artists and educational tools for patients, and it is clear that it is a health care organization that serves as a true health home for the people they serve. One major distinction is that patients greet each other by name in the waiting room. They know each other because, sharing a diagnosis of diabetes, their appointments are grouped together. Janet Montesane, Executive Director of MLK, explained that the center, under the leadership of progressive medical director, Dr. Robert Jackson, has always endeavored to enhance the quality of care they provide and proactively engage patients with chronic disease. “We are always striving for ways to better serve our patients and improve their outcomes. And setting up clinic days for patients – having patients with the same condition come in regularly as teams with assigned providers – is just another way to ensure that patients aren’t slipping through the cracks and are getting the care they need.”

How Group Medical Appointments Work at the MLK Health Center

Patients are assigned to a group and a specific clinic day based on their diagnosis; e.g., a diabetes clinic day. Every three months, patients assigned to the diabetes clinic attend their visit as a group; all the patients arrive at the same time for their appointments so they can connect and socialize. Patients receive care from their assigned provider individually. Each patient has their labs and diagnostics done on site. Their care team, which includes a physician and a nurse practitioner (often advanced practice nursing students under the supervision of

faculty), ensures that patients get all of the recommended care for diabetics – for example, nursing staff make sure foot and eye exams are conducted annually and also ask about feet and vision at each visit. If necessary, staff refer patients to specialists off-site that they have existing relationships with. The center has a well-stocked charitable pharmacy to ensure their patients have access to critical medications at no cost. Patients also join in health education and information sharing sessions. Staff are trained in motivational interviewing and work to set health goals with patients.

This group approach has an impact. “We have shown that our approach produces enhanced patient understanding of their conditions and improves health related behaviors,” Robert H. Jackson, MD, founder and Medical Director said. “We have also shown statistically significant improvement in a critical measure of diabetes control. Other outcomes related research is underway.”

Beyond creating a community inside the center, the staff works to foster connections outside as well. They have a robust volunteer program that includes nursing students and faculty from their local medical and nursing schools. Volunteers organize and participate in community wellness events, health screenings, mobile health clinics, emergency response efforts, and make it a point to collaborate with other care providers and groups in the communities they serve.

This account of group visits in action highlights the impact this type of approach has on patients and their families. Simply providing an opportunity for patients to connect and share with others in similar situations can boost the feeling of humanity in medicine and improve the overall experience of care for those who would otherwise be underserved.

Diabetes Prevention Program Efforts

Diabetes and prediabetes are nearing epidemic proportions in the United States and are especially rampant in underserved communities. Prediabetes is a preventable health condition that increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Estimates show that 79 million people in the United States have prediabetes, but less than ten percent are aware of their condition. In an effort to address this growing problem in their patients and the larger community, the MLK Health Center offers a prevention-oriented education program. They are the only free clinic currently listed on the CDC’s National Registry of recognized diabetes prevention programs, delivering the National Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), a lifestyle change program targeting patients at-risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

The MLK Health Center received a grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation to support staff training on and the ongoing implementation of the DPP. They sent four staff members to be trained by the Diabetes Training and Technical Assistance Center at Emory University. The training provides an overview of the CDC's DPP curriculum - 16 core lifestyle intervention classes and 6 post-core sessions targeting lifestyle changes like healthy eating and exercise and delivered in a group setting. It also covers group facilitation techniques, problem-solving and how to support patients through lifestyle changes.

After training and once the center was ready to implement the program, they went through a process to identify patients who were eligible to participate - those that met criteria for prediabetes. Once they had a core group of people (between 10-15), they were ready to begin their classes. In the DPP classes, these groups come together to learn about their risk of developing diabetes, healthier eating habits and the importance of physical activity. Participants track their weight, physical activity and keep a food log each week to monitor their progress; the MLK facilitators run the class to guide and support the group through the lifestyle change program.

For example, one session topic "Four Keys to Healthy Eating Out," provides practical tips to healthy eating in restaurants – planning ahead, asking for what you want, taking charge of what is around you and choosing healthy foods. Participants brought in menus from popular restaurants and discussed healthy and unhealthy food options from each. All of the participants left the class with a hand weight to promote exercise; just one of the many incentives donated to the MLK Health Center to support the program.

Two groups have completed the DPP classes through the MLK Health Center. In the first group, 9 out of 14 patients completed the 16 core sessions, with 9 out of the 14 experiencing a weight loss of 5% (64.3%); 11 out of 14 increased their physical activity to more than 150 minutes a week (78.6%). In the second group, 10 out of 13 patients completed the 16 core sessions, with 11 out of the 13 experiencing a weight loss of 5% (84.6%); 5 out of the 13 increased their physical activity to more than 150 minutes a week (38.5%).

Mentesane commented that there have been many additional benefits and healthy behavior changes in the participants that are not necessarily reflected in the numbers (e.g., more consciously reading food labels, making healthier choices, impacting the health of friends and family, etc.).

AmeriCares and the GE Foundation

Through the ongoing support and generosity of the GE Foundation, AmeriCares U.S. Medical Assistance Program is working to continue to build capacity in other free and charitable clinics throughout the country, using the experience of those like the MLK Health Center not only as a model for our work but as an example for others to learn from. AmeriCares will be launching a Chronic Disease Care Program: Transforming Prediabetes Care Initiative in 2014. The program will train, support and build capacity in free and charitable clinics and will involve partnering with 7 clinics to implement the CDC's Diabetes Prevention Program for their patients.