

Communities That Care

The History of

HEALTH CHOICE NETWORK





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or decades, community health centers creatively provided care to the underserved of our communities. But as our nation's health care system began to change, community health centers needed to adjust to the move from solo practitioners to large health organizations.

A group of community health centers discovered that forming a unique alliance provides the advantages of a large health system while the individual members can remain independent. Health Choice Network is a story of recognizing the common bonds which can unite and strengthen, of investing in each other and yet remaining independent and giving for a greater good.

The history of Health Choice Network reaches across languages and races, across cultures and across the nation. It includes many visionary individuals who dreamed and sacrificed much to link a wide range of different communities into one powerful force.

In the relatively short span of one decade (1994-2004), Health Choice Network has evolved from a concept to a national model. Much has been accomplished.

Difficult Days for Community Health Centers

The early 1990s were difficult for community health centers in Miami-Dade. Battered by the loss of Medicaid recipients through unscrupulous marketing practices by HMOs, health centers were facing both flat funding from federal and local sources and decaying infrastructures. The centers had not been refurbished since their original *County Decade of Progress* funding in the 1970s, and were now dealing with the twin epidemics of crack cocaine and HIV/AIDS infections.

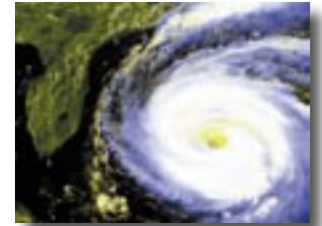
Lack of Local Funding Hurts CHCs

Although community health centers actively participated in the Public Health Trust's (PHT) first county-wide plan for primary care, the PHT took the position that county funds would only be used to build new centers.

A second opportunity for the Federally Qualified Health Care Centers (FQHCs) came when the county approved a bond for PHT/JMH. The centers advocated the spending of a small percentage of the bond revenue for renovation of the 1970s-era facilities and the building of a new primary care center in west Miami-Dade. The PHT again took the position that the funds would only be used for primary care centers owned and controlled by the Trust.

From Disaster, A Coalition is Strengthened

Then, on August 25, 1992, the world changed for South Florida. Hurricane Andrew devastated South Dade and changed the fabric of Miami-Dade County. Centers located in the north sections of the county reached out to sister health center Community Health of South Dade (CHI). That day began the coordination among local FQHCs. As the hurricane recovery began, this coalition of centers arranged the personnel, pharmacy and medical supplies needed in the stricken areas. The coalition continued to act as a unified voice within the Primary Health Care Consortium, which included the PHT, Health Department, Florida Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and other Primary care providers.



1990

september

1992

The Coalition Impresses the Feds

In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, the FQHCs learned that short-term recovery funds were available for health care services through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The centers worked closely with governmental organizations and the Health Department in creating a community-based plan to provide emergency relief to people who were uninsured and homeless. The group received \$10 million dollars to set up a hotline to promote access to the centers, extend and enhance hours of operation at the centers and provide short-term relief.

A Historic Proposal

Realizing that more hurricane relief was needed to spur long-term recovery, Congress appropriated \$35 million for health services in Miami-Dade. The Primary Health Care Consortium was divided on how the money should be spent. The community health centers were united in focusing on rebuilding and expanding in South Dade and throughout the county. The Public Health Trust, also a Consortium member, proposed to start three new primary care centers that they would own and operate. In a historic presentation before federal officials, the two plans were laid on the table. State health officials sided with the CHCs and supported the plan to build on existing infrastructure.



Buoyed by the decision, the centers produced the "Investment in Primary Health Care." The plan called for leveling the playing field for community health centers and linking them more closely, enhancing services and ensuring input by low income and minority consumers.

Fall of 1992

1993

Giving for the Greater Good

At this point, the Centers recognized the need to do their own planning and invest in their own future. The Centers pooled \$15,000 each and started a strategic planning effort toward the formation of a new organization. The three largest centers became the founders of the new organization.

The founding members were the late Jessie Trice, head of the Economic Opportunity Family Health Center; Brodes Hartley, Jr. head of Community Health of South Dade; Caleb Davis, head of Helen B. Bentley Family Health Center and Terisa James, director of Camillus Health Concern (Miami Beach Community Health Center and Borinquen Health Care Center chose not to participate).

The founders called their new organization **Health Choice Network**, and selected Betsey Cooke, director of the Primary Health Care Consortium to lead the new organization. Although the centers jointly invested in and governed the Network, they maintained their independence as corporations and had their own community-based boards. This governance structure would prove important as the Network grew.

The South Florida Hospital and Health Care Association recognized the potential of the Network and joined as a Patron member.

Founding Members



Jessie Trice



Brodes Hartley, Jr.



Caleb Davis



Terisa James



Betsey K. Cooke

Fall of 1993

The Network is Born

Health Choice Network officially began business in June 1994, with funding for one staff person and a half-time CEO. Its stated goals were:

- Provide a higher level of information technology and stabilize finances
- Link the centers in a managed care strategy that would allow members to be leaders, not followers
- Bring back outreach, health education and prevention services in communities where lack of funding forced centers to focus only on primary care and to work in partnership with the faith-based community

Realizing Our Potential

In its first year, the Network was fortunate to receive Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC) funding for an Integrated Services Network (ISN). Health Choice Network was funded to respond to managed care while improving its IT system. The Metro Miami Action Plan contributed local financing to the managed care effort. Neighborhood Health Partnership, an HMO, became the Network's first group contract and supported its first effort in a faith-based and community partnership.

Finding Expertise: Hands Across the Everglades

The Network was operating a decentralized information technology system that was underfunded. When the IT director resigned, the Network looked across the Everglades to Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida (FHCSWF), a fellow member of the Florida Association of Community Health Centers. Family Health Centers' visionary CEO, Lalai Hamric, along with her talented staff, had already created automated business systems that had transformed the center from a mom-and-pop operation to a modern corporation. They discussed the idea of FHCSWF joining the Network, contributing their expertise in IT, finance and organizational development in partial exchange for membership dues.

Hamric was open to the idea. She found working with hospitals as partners problematic, and convinced the board of the advantages of working with peer community health centers. The distance between east and west coasts wasn't an issue – information technology could cross all borders. It was a deal. Health Choice Network had its fifth member.



Lalai Hamric

1994

1995

Cooperation and IT & Finance Services

The Network proposed a concept paper that described the Network's governance and management structure. It had two key features: members would maintain their independent community boards of directors; and members would provide services to their communities through jointly operated functions. This concept paper was carefully reviewed and approved by all of the members' boards of directors and was later endorsed by the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC).

Health Choice Network moved to integrate and centralize IT and finance systems, putting into practice a paper that called for contributing to a delivery system in certain functional areas. Kevin Kearns was given up by Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida to become CFO and CIO.

Three Miami-Dade mental health centers joined the Network, but dropped out during the same period.



Kevin S. Kearns

Learning from others, learning from ourselves

The BPHC recognized the importance of health center networks learning from each other. It implemented the Integrated Services Development Initiative (ISDI) workgroup to stimulate Network development and brought grantees together to share lessons learned.

One of the lessons was that Networks go through three stages: planning, development and operations. With assistance from the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), this learning would later result in changes in community health care legislation to include ongoing support of operating networks.

Giving For the Greater Good: Part Two

In recognition of its significant contribution of accounting hardware and software, as well as a CIO/CFO, FHCSWF was grandfathered in as a founding member of Health Choice Network.

1996

1997

Management Services Organization: Atlantic Care is Born

The HMO issue continued to be at the forefront of Network planning, but the Network judged itself to be too small and underfunded to operate a full-fledged HMO. To address the issue, Economic Opportunity Family Health Centers contributed their managed care leader, Margarita Ollet, to the Network to develop a management services organization that would allow the Network to take risks and share rewards.

Assisting the Network in this endeavor was Physicians Health Plan, an HMO acquired by Amerigroup, a current patron.



Margarita Ollet

Building from a core staff originally employed at Economic Opportunity, the Network created Atlantic Care, a program that has returned over \$4 million in risk payments that would otherwise go to HMOs.

1997

WebMD Practice Services, a major Network vendor, was welcomed as a Patron member.

A Return to Our Faith-Based Roots



Focusing its strengths on partnerships between faith-based institutions and centers, the Network developed the Healthy Body, Healthy Soul outreach program. Jessie Trice, now retired from Economic Opportunity Family Health Centers, convinced Terisa James, from Camillus Health Concern, to lead the program. Monies were committed for the first year of the program, but Terisa and the Network were charged with raising funds to sustain program efforts after that.



1998

Losing a pioneer, Advancing electronic medical records

The Network's visionary leader Jessie Trice was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. During her illness, she challenged the Network to develop a cancer program under the faith-based initiative. Her friend, U.S. Congresswoman Carrie Meek, reached out to the U.S. Senator Connie Mack to fund a national program in Jessie's honor. This program required the Network to reach beyond its scope of primary care to secondary and tertiary care, including clinical trials and community-based research.

Senator Mack also recognized the importance of health records technology, and wanted to provide resources to Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida and the Network to model an electronic health records system at its community health centers. Miraculously, both the electronic health record and cancer program initiative received funding. At the same time, the Florida legislature enacted the Jessie Trice Cancer Prevention Project as law.

1999

New Friends, New Opportunities

Across the country in New Mexico, David Roddy, who directed a Primary Care Association and Integrated Services Network (ISN) in New Mexico, needed a quick solution for improving technology at his network centers.

Not wanting to duplicate resources or efforts, he requested Health Choice Network to consider allowing New Mexico to join and take advantage of economies of scale and speed of implementation.

The New Mexico centers did not want to be stepchildren, but full partners in the formulation of policies and systems development. It was agreed that Health Choice Network would be the New Mexico Network CIO, and that the New Mexico Network would assume a seat on the Health Choice Network board. This agreement created a model for Network national expansion.

Closer to home, just north of Miami-Dade, the newly reorganized Broward Community and Family and Community Health Center joined to share in the Network's larger and more stable infrastructures.



Growth and More Growth

The Network's eighth year proved to be extremely busy and fruitful.

- The New Mexico Network added another health center member and implemented financial integration at two more of its centers.
- In Florida, the Network implemented a centralized billing office (CBO) for six of the Network's seven affiliated members.
- Focusing again on clinical programs, the Network implemented its first disease management program funded by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) and Bristol Myers-Squibb (BMS).
- The Network was proud to receive the Joint Commission Accreditation for Health Organizations (JCAHO) and certification for excellence in diabetes.
- The Network implemented a pilot electronic health records project at three centers.
- Research collaborations were explored with University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute



2000

2001

2002

A New Member in Utah and Closer to Home

For several years, six centers in Utah were eyeing the New Mexico Health Choice Network partnership model, and finally decided it would work for them. The Utah Project (now the Utah Health Choice Network) was added to the Board, receiving full Network IT services, including shared CIO.

Back in Florida, Citrus Health Network, a mental health center in Miami-Dade, rejoined because of their commitment to a stronger infrastructure. Miami Beach Community Health Center, formerly the Stanley Myers Community Health Center, was also welcomed into the Network. The center had elected not to join during the Network's formative period, but now realized the value of the network membership.



2002

Reaching out, continuing to learn and grow

The Network's Dental Committee was searching for a system of electronic oral health records, which had not been part of the original model. They discovered that a center in New Mexico (El Rito) had a system, and it worked well. Two member centers agreed to purchase hardware and software that would allow all centers to implement the electronic oral health record. Installation costs were shared and bartered among Florida and New Mexico centers.

The Network welcomed Community Health Centers of Pinellas as a new member, while the Healthy Body, Healthy Soul program expanded its reach from Miami-Dade and Lee County to Pinellas and Broward.

Finance and IT integration was fully implemented at the Miami Beach and Pinellas centers, while clinical components were added at other member centers.

The Network strengthened its Finance and IT integration to accommodate a larger number of centers.

The Network Goes Electronic

Recognizing the importance of electronic medical records in



*Saint Anthony
Amofah, M.D.*

Centers' ability to improve health outcomes, HRSA developed a competitive grant for Information Communications Technology. Based on its success with the pilot electronic health records project, the Network applied for and received \$4 million

to implement electronic health records at all Florida centers over the next four years. Funding also provided for the development of systems for analyzing and reporting clinical and disease management outcomes. This time, Helen B. Bentley Family Health Center "gave for the greater good" in contributing their medical director, Saint Anthony Amofah, M.D., halftime to the Network as its first medical director.

2003

A New Center and New Patron

Health Care Center for the Homeless in Orlando had operated privately as a storefront homeless center before receiving federal funding. After two years, the center realized it needed more complex financing information and joined the Network.

The Network welcomed its first new patron in many years, H, Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute in Tampa. The goal is to create a research partnership, in which each member's communities would have access to the best programs in cancer prevention and treatment.

Looking to the future

In its continued strategic planning efforts, the Network board of directors has affirmed its focus for the future:

Improving access for its communities

- Converting to electronic health and oral health records
- Developing electronic linkages to the rest of the health care system
- Developing new mechanisms of care for the uninsured
- Establishing services in underserved communities

Reducing disparities in health outcomes

- Developing chronic care and disease management programs
- Implementing the BPHC health disparities collaboratives
- Using technology to analyze and report on health care outcomes
- Improving access to clinical trials, community-based research and tertiary care systems
- Expanding faith-based and community partnerships to link outreach education with primary, secondary and tertiary care



2007 Health Choice Network Members

Agape Network
Bayview Center for Mental Health
Borinquen Health Care Center
Broward Community and Family Health Center
Camillus Health Concern
Citrus Health Network
Community Health Centers of Pinellas
Community Health of South Florida
Economic Opportunity Family Health Center
Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida
Family Medical and Dental Centers
Health Care Center for the Homeless
Helen B. Bentley Family Health Center
Institute for Child and Family Health
Kansas Health Choice Network
Miami Beach Community Health Center
New Horizons Community Mental Health Center
New Mexico Health Choice Network
Premier Community HealthCare Group
Tampa Family Health Centers
Utah Health Choice Network

Patrons

American Cancer Society
Amerigroup
Sage Software Healthcare Division
H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute
South Florida Hospital and Healthcare Association
Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center

08-15-07

HEALTH CHOICE NETWORK

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