

Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

Access to Primary and Preventive Health Services

Whether an individual has health insurance does not always determine whether they have access to health care—it can be an issue of transportation or availability of services. Wisconsin hospitals do whatever they can to improve access. In this issue, we highlight transportation services, school nurse positions, and hospitals' support of parish nursing programs.

Give a toot and trouble steps aside

Don is generally a cheerful man – you can tell by the horn affixed to his walker. He likes to beep it in greeting and his big grin follows right behind it.

But last summer, with a cancer diagnosis that meant radiation therapy treatments at St. Vincent Hospital's Regional Cancer Center five days a week, he had a dilemma that could wipe the smile off anyone's face.

Don had to get from Oconto Falls north of Green Bay every day for treatments and he couldn't drive himself. He lived alone, and had no funds to pay for transportation or for overnight accommodations in Green Bay. Paying for meals was another expense not in Don's budget.

Tom Bekkers, psychotherapist and social worker at St. Vincent, stepped in to assist Don, and others joined Tom to help a bad deal get a whole lot better for a cancer patient who needed support financially and emotionally.

Using the hospital's resources and working with the Oconto County Commission on Aging and Candlewood Suites, a hotel not far from St. Vincent, the three entities were able to share the reduced rates of lodging each Monday through Thursday. Don declared the hotel was "beautiful," a good place to rest up after his daily treatments.

"And then St. Vincent supplied all my meals every day," Don said. "And they were good!"

An Oconto County driver brought Don to St. Vincent in time for his Monday morning radiation appointments. St. Vincent paid the taxi fare to get him to and from the hotel the rest of the week, and on Friday afternoons, an Oconto Falls neighbor who worked in Green Bay picked him up at the Cancer Center to take him home for the weekend. St. Vincent supplied her with gas cards to help defray her expenses.

Having that team pulling for him made life a lot easier for the retiree who made MirroCraft Boats before his illness.

"We hook people up with services and find ways to allow them to get the best treatment and home town services," Bekkers said of the Case Management team. "That might be bus tokens and passes and a bus schedule. We try creative exploration to find what's out there. For medications, we know that Wal-Mart and Target offer some drugs with only a \$4 co-pay. We have to be creative and come up with the finances. We often turn to the Salvation Army or NEW Community Clinic.

"In Don's case, it was a community effort – Oconto County, the Salvation Army, a driver service one way and a friend to bring him the other way. It took everyone pitching in together to really make this work," Bekkers noted.

"And it took Don's fantastic spirit," the case manager added. "The last day when he was ready to leave, he was all dressed up and cheerful. His attitude went a long way."

St. Vincent Hospital, Green Bay

Wheels-a-waiting

It was a Friday in September and one of our cancer patients was in dire need of assistance. The doctor informed the nurse that the patient needed radiation and could not afford transportation. Because she needed to visit two of our other clinics prior to the treatments, we were informed it would be a while before the radiation could begin. However, we knew it would take about 35 or more trips from her home to the Cancer Center and back home after the treatments. The patient was very concerned and said she could not have the radiation. She was told there was no reason to worry, because a van would pick her up and bring her home each and every time. The nurse called to tell us that the biggest smile in the world broke out on the patient's face, and her thanks was abundant with that news.

Holy Family Memorial Medical Center, Manitowoc

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They say - there's always hope

There was a knock at my door and when I arrived at the entrance, a man and woman said, "Thanks for being here – we really need your help." I invited them to be seated and asked how I could be of assistance. I learned that the husband had cancer and it was not a happy situation. He was still holding his job, but it was difficult for him and he had to take off frequently. It was hard going, yet, both he and his wife wanted a second opinion. The problem was that their car could not make a trip to Milwaukee, and they had very little money for gas. Noting the looks on their faces, I realized this was their last hope. I called the bus station for departure and arrival times, worked out a method of payment acceptable to the bus terminal, wished them blessings, and heard the wife say, "There's always hope; thank you so much!"

Holy Family Memorial Medical Center, Manitowoc

Hospital reaches out through school nurse

Kim Lindroth, RN, the school nurse in central-city Milwaukee, starts her day teaching three health classes for eighth-grade students at Westside Academy. "Thankfully, I have found a nursing career that keeps me working with children and incorporates creativity and ingenuity," Lindroth says. "No day is ever dull." Her position is funded by Froedtert Hospital as part of its community outreach initiatives.

"This is what makes my position extremely gratifying," says Lindroth, who has been part of the Froedtert staff since October 2007 and has six years of experience in pediatric nursing, as well as one year working with adults. "Being an educator of young, intelligent individuals is a privilege, and I know that doing preventive education can reduce many community health complications."

In the course of one morning at the Westside Academy II site that serves fourth through eighth graders, Lindroth treats two girls with eye problems while another has a sore throat that she says has lasted a week.

In the afternoon, Lindroth heads to Westside Academy I for Head Start through third grade. As she walks across the playground, two girls approach her saying they have cracked teeth that hurt. Once inside the building, Lindroth attends to a boy who has a welt developing on his forehead after running into another child. Lindroth does a quick assessment and reassures the boy. Shortly after, she sees the familiar face of a first-grade girl who complains of a stomach ache and sore throat, asks for lotion for her eczema and says she could use a new toothbrush.

After lunch, Lindroth organizes post-tests and tallies results of student surveys to prepare her year-end report. Her routine paperwork includes charting as well reminding parents about immunizations, prescription medications or other matters, or to schedule a meeting. Efforts to get in touch with parents can sometimes be a frustrating when families relocate or working-poor parents with inflexible jobs cannot afford to take time off work.

In the 2008-09 school year, Lindroth provided 1,285 health visits to students. And even though her days are filled to the brim, an idea crosses Lindroth's mind: A Student Health and Wellness Plan for middle school students who do not get regular exercise or outdoor recess. She makes plans to type up the proposal before leaving for summer break after a very busy, 10-month work schedule during the school year.

Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital, Milwaukee

Providing care through our faith communities

Modern society seems to accept a separation between business practices and the business of faith communities. Each entity operates free from oversight of the other. Health care is by nature a different type of business, however, as physical, social and sometimes spiritual well-being are considered net assets.

Where healing is the central focus of the health care industry, faith communities promote health and healing with a well-defined spiritual dimension.

Fort HealthCare recognizes the close relationship that faith and healing have in the lives of many people in the communities it serves. To better support the existing faith and parish nurses in area congregations, Fort HealthCare created a Faith Nurse Program. Fort HealthCare is a central resource for support and education, sharing information once per month at a community faith nurse group meeting, or more often as needed. In return, participating churches and nurses work together with Fort HealthCare to provide specific resources, education and support to the Faith Nurse.

The Fort HealthCare Faith Nurse Program assists faith-based health professionals, clergy, and lay leaders with a goal to promote health for individuals in mind, body and spirit. The faith nurse program puts people that may be home-bound, uninsured or unable to care for themselves in touch with caring hands, supported by a network of like-minded individuals and the area's leading community health network, free of charge.

A faith nurse acts as a resource for their church and recognizes when members of their congregation may need additional care, provides health education, teaches individuals about diseases, health conditions and medications, understands the spiritual needs of individuals, acts as a personal health counselor, coordinates or provides health screening services, develops necessary support groups, all with the ultimate goal of helping to improve the health of the community overall.

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Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

A faith nurse program can improve awareness of available services, increase utilization of existing health care delivery systems, and promote health and healing by empowering individuals to incorporate key elements from their belief systems into their health care plan. Faith nurse programs can also educate congregations on health care issues and offer opportunities for outreach ministry into surrounding communities. Fort HealthCare extends care to individuals through faith communities throughout Cambridge, Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Johnson Creek, Lake Mills, Whitewater, Palmyra, Milton, Edgerton and beyond.

Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson

Aurora Parish Nursing

During 2008, 21 Aurora Health Care parish nurses provided services to 32 faith communities in southeastern Wisconsin. But numbers alone don't convey the role of parish nursing in supporting and extending the continuum of care in personal, unique ways.

Aurora Parish Nursing: Diabetes prevention and management

A diabetes diagnosis can cause significant anxiety and stress. However, with adequate information and resources it can be managed, and in some cases prevented. For Janet, diabetes was not a reality she wanted to face. But after a visit to her primary care physician she was told that she "was on the road to diabetes."

Janet was overwhelmed with the news. Although she was grateful not to have a diagnosis of full-blown diabetes, she was panicky about how to prevent the disease. While her insurance covered diabetes treatment, it did not apply for measures that would help prevent diabetes. Fortunately, Janet was able to find the support she needed in her faith community and was connected with Aurora Parish Nurse Pat Shapiro.

Pat began by providing information about healthy eating and exercise. She obtained a glucose meter for Janet and taught her how to use it to monitor her blood sugars at home. Armed with the combination of proper tools, knowledge and personal support, Janet felt confident in taking control and responsibility for her situation and making healthier choices.

As a result of her connection to an Aurora parish nurse, Janet has been able not only to slow the progression of diabetes, but with continuing support from her parish nurse and faith community may succeed in preventing it altogether. For ongoing support, Pat connected Janet to others from eight Milwaukee-area faith communities who regularly attend a diabetes education and support group she developed and leads.

Aurora Parish Nursing: Connecting mind, body and spirit

George, a congenial and helpful 40-year-old man who is well known to Janetha, an Aurora Parish Nurse, had his driver's license taken away and, like many others at the parish, he was finding it difficult to obtain secure employment.

Having straightened out his life with the support of his faith community, George had his priorities. One day he came to Janetha's parish nurse office waving his valid drivers license and announcing: "It took me two years to pay off those tickets."

She understood full well that it was a major achievement for him – and big step forward in his life.

Next on his agenda, he informed her, was getting a truck, because he had lost that when he lost his license.

But just looking at him, she knew that his health was an issue. She observed facial swelling and when she asked him about it, George confirmed that he had a toothache for a few days.

"This morning I thought there was a light at the end of the tunnel until I looked in the mirror and saw my jaw," he confessed. "So I came to see if you could help me."

Recognizing that he had no insurance and little, if any, money, she conducted a brief medical history and assured him that she had a solution to his health dilemma.

"I feel better already," he declared.

Two phone calls later George left the office to see Mr. Carter the pharmacist to obtain temporary relief for the pain and then to Martin Luther King Clinic for further assessment and to see a dentist as soon as possible.

Relieved and grateful, George turned as he was leaving and said, "Now I know there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Aurora Health Care, Milwaukee

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.



Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at www.WiServePoint.org.