

Innovative approach to healthcare: Group hosting barbecues to celebrate its success in helping others be healthier

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Healthcare Network physician Dr. Jorge Camina motivated 15-year-old Naila to lose 50 pounds by exercising and eating healthier. Naila's success inspired her father to lose 50 pounds as well. This sort of managed care for the under- and uninsured is better for the patient and more cost effective. Kaydee Tuff/Citizen Contributor

Sixty pounds overweight and borderline diabetic, 15-year-old Naila could have been just another statistic among the 7.6 million uninsured children in America, but today she is 50 pounds lighter, a vibrant teen contributing to her Golden Gate community thanks to the comprehensive managed care she received through the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida.

To celebrate thousands of success stories like Naila's and enlighten the public about the innovative ways health centers are serving more than 20 million under- or uninsured people each year, Healthcare Network will celebrate National Health Center Week from Aug. 11-17.

Under the timely theme, "Transforming Health Care," the Healthcare Network will host two community celebrations featuring food, festivities and information. An Immokalee barbecue will be held from 12-2 p.m., Tuesday, Aug. 13, at the Marion E. Fether Medical Center, 1454 Madison Avenue, and a Naples barbecue will be held from 3:30-5:30 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 15, at the Golden Gate Community Center, 4700 Golden Gate Parkway.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), one out of every 15 people living in the U.S. now relies on a community care provider like Healthcare Network for

primary care and those numbers are expected to rise dramatically under the Affordable Care Act.

Studies show that if the 46 million uninsured people in America were to suddenly have health insurance coverage, there would be a crisis due to the lack of primary health care clinicians to serve them.

“We’re creating innovative solutions to address the dilemma of providing quality, managed healthcare for people that few agencies are willing to care for,” says Healthcare Network CEO Richard Akin, who has served the Healthcare Network for more than 30 years. “We offer an alternative to the more expensive and often inappropriate emergency room. If more people have access to care with an emphasis on prevention and treatment, we all benefit.”

The success of community health centers like Healthcare Network has drawn significant attention in Washington. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently awarded more than \$150 million to assist community health centers in education and enrollment of uninsured individuals in new health insurance coverage options under the Affordable Care Act.

Here in Collier County, the Healthcare Network received just over \$176,000, which will be used to expand education and enrollment in Golden Gate, East Naples and Immokalee.

“The \$176,000 is a good start and certainly an indication that Healthcare Network will be leading the way in providing quality managed healthcare for a growing population of Collier citizens,” says Healthcare Network Foundation Director Louis Traina. “As that population grows, so does the tremendous need for services. Without private support, services such as managed and preventative care for children with diabetes would not exist. Every child deserves quality medical and dental care.”

Last year, Healthcare Network provided \$3.4 million in uncompensated health care to 45,000 under- or uninsured people (32,000 of whom were children). By providing these families with a “patient centered home,” doctors are able to follow their patients, ensure necessary treatment and provide preventative education that actually reduces long-term health care costs.

Healthcare Network does this with a staff of 275, including 42 medical and dental professionals and medical students from Florida State University College of Medicine and the University of Florida College of Dentistry. Other significant educational partners include Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology Dental Assistant Program and Nova Southeastern School of Nursing.

“Most people have no idea of the many facilities and services we offer,” says Akin. “That’s why we recently conducted a re-branding to reintroduce ourselves as we move the Network toward a Patient Centered Medical Home that facilitates partnerships between patients and their physicians. It’s what’s best for the patient and it’s the way health care should be provided.”

The Healthcare Network serves the community with 13 care centers located in North Naples, East Naples, Golden Gate, Marco Island and Immokalee, as well as the NCEF Pediatric Dental Center on the Collier campus of Edison State College and the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile.

Funding for the Healthcare Network comes from patient fees and reimbursements, federal grants and generous philanthropic support. More than 96 percent of funding goes directly to patient care.