

The Front Lines of Primary Care: A Case Study of an Exemplary Federally Qualified Health Center

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KEY POINTS:

- Over four decades, Community Health Center, Inc. evolved from a small storefront clinic to one of the leading independent, nonprofit primary care providers in the country.
- Community engagement and sustained leadership focus on continuous improvement have been required for system-wide, patient-focused transformation.
- An integrated, team-based model of primary care has improved health outcomes for underserved populations and built healthier communities
- The ability to respond to new and emerging problems (homelessness, HIV, opioid crisis) is a core strength.
- The integration of innovation and research has been critical for transformation, with new technologies incorporated into clinical practices.
- Patient-focused care teams have been enhanced by intensive workforce training and thoughtful evolution of care provider roles.
- The blend of an independent, nonprofit organization with a consumer/patient-dominated board of directors has supported entrepreneurial growth and expansion.

Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC) is the leading independent, nonprofit healthcare provider in the state of Connecticut, providing comprehensive primary care services in medicine, dentistry, and behavioral health to 100,000 people annually at more than 200 service locations. When CHC began providing care in 1972, the initial focus was to assure that all in the community who needed healthcare had access to it, regardless of ability to pay. Today, CHC is a statewide Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), relentlessly dedicated to building a world-class primary healthcare system, and focused on healthy outcomes and healthy communities. The CHC mission is not just to provide healthcare, but to transform healthcare through research, education, training, and performance improvement.

Dr. Flinter described the CHC's commitment to transform healthcare delivery with an ongoing pursuit of clinical excellence, the integration of innovation and research, and training for healthcare professionals. Over four decades, with perseverance, discipline, leadership, community engagement, technology, and partnerships with the public and private sectors, CHC has improved health outcomes for underserved populations. Every patient has a high-vitality, well-trained, and driven team of primary care, oral health, nutrition, and behavioral health clinicians. Each care team is supported with delivery of clinical and operational performance data. CHC was one of the first practices in the country to move to an entirely electronic health record (EHR), and using the EHR to report clinical quality measures has supported CHC in achieving a high level of performance and clinical outcomes. With community care teams, case/care



managers for high risk patients, school-based health centers, and a focus on key populations such as the homeless and patients living with HIV, CHC takes care directly to the patients.

CHC developed the first formal, postgraduate nurse practitioner residency training program in the U.S. CHC also offers a postdoctoral psychology residency program providing comprehensive training in the provision of psychological care in an integrated model, and is developing a psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioner residency program aimed at training new nurse practitioners in both high complexity care and high performance models of care delivery. CHC's models for postgraduate residency-based training are now being adopted by organizations across the U.S.

The Weitzman Institute, the research and development arm of CHC, conducts original research, tests and scales promising innovations such as e-consults, and leads education and training efforts for primary care providers in the field through case-based distance learning. The Institute is the first community-based research center established by an FQHC, and is dedicated to quality improvement, practice transformation, and research in primary care for the underserved.

[VIDEO: Community Health Center, Inc.](#)

[SLIDES: Community Health Center, Inc.](#)

