



King County Project Access

Physicians Stepping Forward

by Sallie Neillie

Health care in the United States presently exists in a state of suspended transformation. Recent estimates suggest that nearly one in six do not have health insurance. The number of uninsured is increasing each year. The majority of the uninsured are employed, often at multiple jobs, but do not have affordable health insurance.

Eventually, patients receive care. However, this care often comes late in the course of illness when the likelihood of complications is much greater and the cost of care, much higher. The dollar cost of care for the uninsured is borne by the entire health-care system; the overall consequences are borne throughout society as a whole.

To care properly for these patients, the physicians participating in King County Project Access (KCPA) have become leaders in changing the health care access paradigm. Indeed, they are counted among those who ask the questions and find the answers that chart the new course for health care.

KCPA is an innovative program for the care of King County residents that demonstrates this kind of effective physician leadership in action. KCPA is a physician-led community-based partnership that brings together

the medical specialty resources of the community in a comprehensive program of voluntary service for the low-income uninsured residents. Yet each individual physician only commits to a discrete and finite amount of donated care.

Physician leadership is essential for the success of the program, both for the direct patient care that physicians provide and for their ability to mobilize the other community resources necessary to provide medically necessary specialty care to this population. When a physician requires hospital services for a KCPA patient, the procedures followed are the same as those for a patient with insurance except no bill is sent; care is written off by the physician, the hospital and by other needed services.

King County Project Access establishes a forum that allows health care and community leaders to work side by side across boundaries to solve shared problems. The two fundamental principles behind Project Access are: 1) *people genuinely care about and are willing to help others if given an effective and equitable way to do so* and 2) *through coordinated effort across a community, resources can be aligned to do much more good than any one entity can accomplish alone.*

The work of the many dedicated physician and lay leaders who helped create KCPA demonstrates these basic principles in action. KCPA is not a long-term solution for the problem of lack of insurance, but it is a beginning. KCPA demonstrates the kind of collaborative problem solving that is needed to create a better health-care system.

Through participation in KCPA physicians are shaping their professional and our medical future. To date over 200 physicians have said "yes" to seeing our patients and thus, being a leader in this movement. And yet, there are holes in what specialties we offer based on the physicians enrolled. If you'd like to participate in KCPA, we'd welcome the chance to talk with you. For more information on this important initiative, please contact us at 206-788-4204.

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