

Inside KCMS



Letter to the Editor

Most physicians provide free care or charity work at one time or another. In fact, most physicians I know provide such care routinely. However, the biggest problem with such care has always been the fact that they are disjointed. A doctor may treat a patient's high blood pressure or diabetes for free, but if that same patient develops complications that the doctor cannot manage, there is no place to turn to for help.

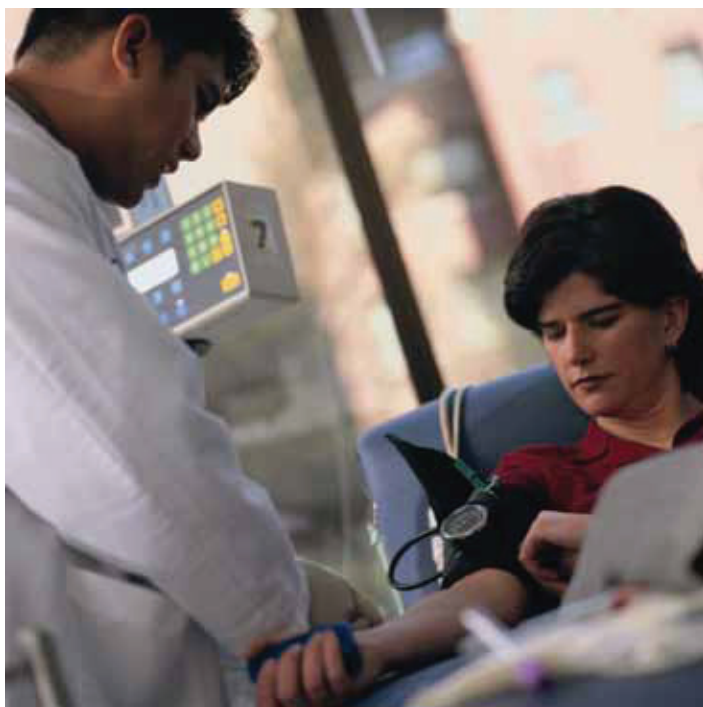
With the current recession, the need for charity care is greater than ever. The number of people who are uninsured and the working poor have steadily grown. For those who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare but can't afford the high cost of health insurance, any serious illness may mean financial ruin, including loss of their home or business.

I bring this up because I want to introduce you to a very unique, local, non-profit organization called King County Project Access (KCPA). It is a network of doctors, hospitals, and ancillary services such as labs, and radiology services that have all agreed to provide a safety net for these patients that may otherwise fall through the crack.

For physicians, coordinating the charitable work through the KCPA allows us to deliver our services more efficiently with greater sense of satisfaction and reward at the same time avoid feeling overwhelmed. Most physicians see no more than 1–2 new patients a month. If a patient needs ancillary services or a referral to a specialist, this is coordinated by the staff of KCPA; this takes the burden off the doctor and his staff.

Knowing that there is a network of other providers, including specialists, and ancillary services that will help provide a more comprehensive care for these patients make each of us feel like what we are doing is worthwhile rather than feeling helpless. Often, when providing charity care, we feel like we are fighting a losing battle, that whatever each of us does isn't making any real difference in the lives of the patients that we are trying to help.

Patients also benefit from such coordinated care. They know, going in, that all the doctors and ancillary services that they will be seeing through the KCPA have volunteered to help them, free of charge. They don't have to beg for a charity at every turn. Knowing that, they are more likely to comply with the recommended care. Often, a minor problem that might have been easily treated early on becomes much bigger one because it wasn't dealt with in timely fashion. We know that those who have access to care are much more likely to be proactive in their own healthcare.



First, patients must qualify for this service and are limited to be enrolled for only a period of time. Patient must be a King County resident, between 18 to 64 years of age, without medical insurance, earning less than 200% above national poverty level and is not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid. That financial threshold comes to about \$40,000 a year for a family of four.

Obviously, this is not alternative to universal healthcare. However, for those who qualify, such service may mean a difference between financial ruin and continuing to be a productive member of the society. After all, it is in everyone's interest to keep everyone healthy and productive.

Last thanksgiving, KCPA took out a full page advertisement in the Seattle Times thanking all the providers and ancillary services that have volunteered to be a part of this charitable organization. They listed all the providers by their name. It was nice being recognized for the charitable work that we do, but what amazed me the most was how many physicians have signed up. It was wonderful to know that I belonged to a large group of similar minded people who care and wants to help the less fortunate among us and to pay back to our community.

The other day, I received a brochure from King County Project Access. I have been involved with KCPA for few years, but I have never visited their website, www.kcprojectaccess.org. When I checked out the physician's section www.kcprojectaccess.org/physician.html, it dawned on me why this actually works. Trying to do charity work on you own can be quite frustrating and time consuming. Having an organization like KCPA that allows us to donate our time and skills without worrying about the time consuming coordination of care and referral to ancillary and specialty services makes our work more efficient and satisfying.

I would like to encourage my fellow physicians to get involved with the KCPA. I would welcome you to check out their website www.kcprojectaccess.org. Since most of us provide charity care anyway, utilizing an organization such as the KCPA makes all the sense in the world.

Sincerely,
Kyle Oh, MD