PROJECT ACCESS KITSAP

Article submitted by the office of Commissioner Rob Gelder

The KCMS believes this project could have a significant impact on our members & asked Rob Gelder, from Project Access to submit an article to the Communiqué.

Community leaders, led by County Commissioner Rob Gelder, are looking to change the way Kitsap hospitals treat patients. The pilot program, called Project Access Northwest, is a mechanism to manage uninsured and underinsured patients to ensure that they get the care they need in the most efficient way possible. Frequently, low-income patients put off medical treatments until they become expensive emergencies, miss scheduled appointments and have trouble following treatment plans. Project Access NW is meant to help with all of these problems. Funding from Harrison Medical Center and United Way will launch the pilot project this fall.

In 2010, Hospitals in Washington State provided roughly \$378 million in charity care and wrote off nearly \$311 million in bad debt. In 2012, the total amount of uncompensated care will likely increase to \$1 billion. Project Access NW hopes to reduce this spending by minimizing no-shows, reducing emergency room visits and providing adminis-

trative efficiencies to participating partners.

A lack of access to medical services is a big problem in Kitsap County. There are over 20,000 uninsured adults in Kitsap County and about 35,000 adults who are underinsured. Adults in the lowest income brackets are more than twice as likely to fall into these categories as the general population of Kitsap County. Project Access NW targets families and individuals living below 200% of the federal poverty line and tries to make their participation in the medical system easier for everyone involved.

Project Access NW works with general practitioners to connect qualified patients with needed specialist services. Since Project Access NW makes sure the necessary labs, scans and other diagnostics are completed before the specialist sees the patient the appointments are streamlined for doctors. The patients are also more likely to show up and follow their treatment regimen since Project Access NW ameliorates many of the barriers patients face: large copays, language barriers and a lack of transportation being a few of the most common.

The Project Access NW Pilot is based off of a successful program in King and Snohomish Counties, titled Project Access Northwest (PANW). Since its inception in 2005 PANW has helped thousands of King and Snohomish County residents get the treatment they need and saved millions of dollars for hospitals and specialists. The program is meant to change the treatment experience for both doctor and patient. Participants in Project Access NW have an experience that is indistinguishable from the experience of most insured patients.

The majority of doctors already provide some free care to patients that need it, but without case management specialist visits frustrate both doctors and patients. One of the most important aspects of the Project Access NW model is equity. No one provider can open their doors to every uninsured patient. Doctors who choose to be involved in the program select their own level of participation per month. In this way, Project Access allows participation without requiring participants to invest substantial resources.

Finding a solution is in the best interest of patients and medical providers. The pilot program will start small and likely only affect 100-150 patients in its first year, but if it grows in the way the program has in other counties, Kitsap's healthcare system may well change permanently for the better.







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