

Executive Summary

East Texas Medical Center, Quitman, TX, utilizes a block grant from the Texas Department of Human Services to fund its Primary Health Care (PHC) program for uninsured patients. The program covers primary health care services for patients who earn too much income to qualify for other public assistance programs but cannot afford health insurance on their own. Individuals that qualify for the program can seek care at three rural primary care clinics in the area, including primary care services, basic x-ray services, and some specialty radiological exams and ultrasounds. A few non-maintenance prescriptions, such as antibiotics, are also covered under the program.

The number of Hispanic patients in the program is significant, despite a small proportion of Hispanic individuals in the community. As a result, the medical center ensures that all documents are available in English and Spanish and strives to staff the clinics with bilingual employees. The PHC program has been in place for five years, and has had a positive impact on the hospital's bad debt and emergency room utilization.

Organization Size: 30 beds

Program/Initiative Description

Primary Health Care Grant: East Texas Medical Center, Quitman, is the recipient of a grant through the Texas Department of State Health Services to provide primary health care services to uninsured patients. The Primary Health Care (PHC) program targets patients who "fall between the cracks," or patients that earn too much income to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford health insurance on their own and do not receive health insurance benefits through their employer.

Individuals are eligible for the program if they do not qualify for any other public assistance programs, are uninsured, and meet the income requirements. When the program began, PHC participants accessed health services at a rural health clinic affiliated with the hospital. The program has now expanded to four rural health clinics. Although individuals must come to the original clinic to register for the program, they may seek care at any of the three clinics once they have been accepted into the program.

The block grant provides funding for participants to access primary health care services, basic x-ray services, and some specialty radiological exams and ultrasounds. The medical center also initially included prescription coverage, but it was necessary to restrict the prescriptions included due to lack of funding and

the growing size of program. A limited list of approximately 12 non-maintenance medications is currently available through the program, including antibiotics. The program does help patients apply for free drug programs offered through pharmaceutical companies for maintenance medications. During the 12-month period beginning September 2003 though August 2004, more than \$622,000 of free medicine was provided.

The number of patients in the PHC program is significantly greater than the number of Hispanic individuals in the community's population. This is in due in part to a Hispanic physician working at the main clinic. In addition to the Hispanic physician, the medical center provides all documentation in English and Spanish and strives to staff the clinics with bilingual employees as much as possible.

Establishment of Program/Initiative: 1999

Racial or Ethnic Disparities Problem the Program/Initiative Was Designed to Address

- The medical center is located in an area with a large portion of Medicare and Medicaid patients, and relatively high unemployment resulting in a significant number of uninsured patients.
- Although there is not a high percentage of Hispanics in the community, 53 percent of the program's participants are Hispanic and 5 percent are African American.

Major Objectives: Provide primary health care services for those who "fall through the cracks" in the health care system

Significant Results

- Unnecessary hospitalizations have declined as a result of uninsured individuals receiving primary health care services and prescription medication they otherwise would not have had access to.
- The program has lowered the number of uninsured patients presenting to the hospital's emergency room for non-emergent care.
- Emergency room visits have declined as individuals in the Primary Health Care program have access to regular medical care and acute care.
- Between September 2003 and August 2004, the program assisted 930 patients, which generated 3,515 patient visits. Since 1999, the program has assisted 3,577 patients.

External Partners in the Program/Initiative: None

Limitations or Problems Encountered: The medical center initially tried to cover participants' medications, but the cost of prescription coverage resulted in limited ability to accept new applicants; the program now covers a limited number of non-maintenance medications, such as antibiotics.

Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date: The current annual grant is for \$252,700.

Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program:

The program is beneficial to the organization and the community, and should be explored if the state provides access to grants for a similar program.

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