

Wheeler Clinic One Year On

It was just over a year ago that Wheeler Clinic opened their new facility at 43 Woodland St. and we wrote about it in the News & Views. In that time they have added 6 Community Health Workers (CHW), as well as a Community Health Coordinator.

Their purpose is to bring an integrated approach to health care where the patient is the center of their own medical care. Here the social determinants of health and their associated needs are addressed. Therefore, being available is not enough,



From left Caroline Austin & Madeline Trinidad, CHWs, Keturah Kinch Director of Health Center Community Engagement; Jarraal Pete, CHW; Christiane Pimentel, Community Health Outreach Coordinator

outreach workers are trained to connect to the people most in need and help them to identify health problems, seek available help and give valuable feedback to the staff. Anyone who comes into Wheeler for the first time is given a comprehensive intake assessment by a clinical social worker or a psychiatric doctor and based on that, recommendations for care are made. If that includes services beyond Wheeler's own capacity, they will refer the individual to another provider, but they continue to be responsible for the individual's comprehensive needs going forward.

Depending on the individual, the relationship of trust with the community health worker may continue on indefinitely, or may be transferred to all of Wheeler.

One tool that Wheeler employs to achieve this, as Keturah said is "collaboration ...with members of the community, stakeholders, experts and leaders in the social and faith based community and neighborhood associations like AHNA, to ensure that we're all on the same page even if... we're not sure what to do. At least we're talking and exploring ways to better serve our community. It's about quality of life."

"I think the Community Health Worker Program seeks to help ... empower the community and empower individuals to take charge and control of their health. And really our health is everything."

The community health workers start their day with a huddle with the other clinical care team that includes physicians, a Psych Doc, APRNs (Advanced Practice Registered Nurse) and Medical Assistants to go over the list of patients for the day.

One of the community health workers comes from the Collaboration for Community Health, which is a collaboration between the Hispanic Health Council (HHC) and Wheeler Clinic. As a result, a specially trained bi-lingual CHW has been hired to interact with high-risk diabetic and hypertensive patients. She is trained in the HHC's adaptation of their "dial best" model whereby they work with the clients in their homes on their self-management goals. Basically this is to reinforce the recommendations of the doctors and nutritionist to address their health care needs. HHC has developed a model that has been

successful in addressing the barriers to optimum health care for these patients, and Wheeler is collaborating with them to treat any patients in Hartford who could benefit and would be willing to take advantage of this service.

All in all, it looks to be a great program to help people get healthy and avoid costly interventions later on.