



Healthcare with a heart, close to home!

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Neighborhood HealthSource is an EEOE/AAP

Welcome everyone to the kick off of our 2020 Virtual Gala event. We so pleased that you have taken the time to check out our site!

Well, we didn't see this coming, did we? In our 48th year of operation, we made some big changes in our organization. Due to the timing of these significant changes, we decided we had to skip our annual event in the Fall of 2019. Frankly, these changes just put too much on our plate to also pull off a major annual event.

Boy, at that moment, we thought we knew what a full plate really looked like. Of course today, we realize that the Fall of 2019 was a walk in the park compared to what we have been through during the first eight months of 2020. The Pandemic hit in early March, and as we all know, our lives were permanently changed. More on that in a couple minutes.

So why were we feeling stressed in the Fall of 2019 (it seems ages ago, doesn't it?), and why did we decide not to hold our traditional annual event last fall? By now, most of you know that our organization took a very bold step last August (yes, just one year ago) to acquire a fourth clinic site. Last August, North Metro Pediatrics in Coon Rapids became part of the Neighborhood HealthSource family. With this important addition, Neighborhood HealthSource spread its capacity to deliver our Mission to Anoka County. Serving multiple northwest suburbs, North Metro became the first Federally Qualified Health Center in Anoka County. As part of establishing this site, we needed to supplement the pediatric services this practice had provided in the area since 2005, with full service family practice capabilities; serving all ages. By early December, we had added a family nurse practitioner to the North Metro team. We spent the first couple of month's post acquisition converting their patient scheduling, registration and medical record documentation systems, along with IT and telephone systems from existing systems to those used by Neighborhood HealthSource. No small task.

Also occurring in early October 2019 was our once every three-year federal inspection. This wonderful four-day event involves a team of inspectors reviewing almost every aspect of our

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operation. This Inspection is normally a daunting process. Imagine how much more complicated it was as a result of adding a new practice 8 weeks prior to the inspection team arriving.....
(BTW, our inspection results were impressive; thanks to our talented managers and staff.)

So hopefully you can understand our decision to not hold a live event last fall, opting instead to try (as we then believed to be a one-time) on-line annual event.

We now look back fondly on those easy days of late Summer and Fall of 2019. We had no clue how relatively easy we had it in those good 'ole days! Obviously, we had no idea what awaited us in 2020.

So in the middle of trying to build a new site, expand its services in new locations, and build our Substance Use Disorder Treatment program, all seemed well with the world; excitement for what our 49th year of operation would bring. What could possibly go wrong?

I'm pretty well known (and sometimes criticized) for my compulsive contingency planning, but not even that skill could anticipate a once in a hundred-year world-wide pandemic. Really, in as short as three weeks in early March of 2020, our entire world and way of life was dramatically upended. Well, they say "timing is everything" right? Turned out not to be the best time to build a new practice site.

So you kind of already know the rest of the story. Most of our family life and work life were dramatically altered. Lifetime events were postponed or canceled. Our reliance on human connection were severed. Primary care medical care was essentially suspended, and patient volume immediately dried up. Medical clinics were temporarily or permanently closed. By early April, our patient revenue and visits had decreased to less than 25 percent of normal. Like other health centers in the State and across the nation, we faced the painful decision to temporarily limit our operating hours and partially furloughing some of our staff.

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By mid-April, the initial path forward began to emerge. We would need to qualify for the massive Federal assistance being made available to help sustain Health Centers and small businesses throughout the Country. Our organization was one of the first health centers in the state to qualify for the federal Payroll Protection Program. In addition, by late April we began to qualify for supplemental grant revenue made available by the federal and state governments.

We also quickly realized that the delivery of primary care medical and behavioral health services would dramatically change in the short term (and likely permanently). Much more of our patient interactions would occur remotely, over the phone or computer; rather than the face-to-face visit we had come to rely on for so many years. In as little as three weeks in April, our staff completely transformed the way we delivered our services; and used new technology and workflows to treat the majority of our patients virtually. It seemed like an insurmountable hurdle at the time (and still today I shake my head in utter disbelief over what we accomplished in so short a time), but by the end of April we started seeing our patients virtually; and haven't looked back since then! Our dedicated and resilient staff met this incredible challenge head on. Today, we are seeing 65 percent of our patients virtually.

These two critical crisis response tactics (supplemental grant revenue, and replacement revenue generated from telemedicine) have stabilized our financial position and will maintain that stability throughout the remainder of 2020. Our services were restored completely by the end of April, and our staff fully restored to their pre-pandemic levels. Today, we are seeing roughly 93 percent of our pre-pandemic patient volumes; and this continues to grow each month.

Work life has changed dramatically for us. About 25 percent of our staff work from home, and may work from home for months to come, if not permanently. We have all learned to “Zoom” or “Teams” for our meeting needs. Those of us remaining in the clinics have all experienced the anxiety of health risk, cleaning protocols, physical distancing, mask irritation, and hand irritation from constant cleansing and disinfecting. We have delivered COVID testing in a drive-up setting at our Central site. And it has all become the norm. I've learned that the human body and spirit is extremely adaptable and resilient.

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Our staff deserves so much credit for helping to protect our mission and legacy. They have created and implemented the changes necessary to continue to serve our patients in the middle of a world-wide pandemic.

And then, if that somehow all of that could not be defined as a big enough, life time challenge, the late May murder of George Floyd and the unrest that followed placed another obstacle in our path. These events deeply impacted our patients, our organization and our staff in significant ways. Many suffered property damage and disruption from the already strained and uneven systems on which they relied to get by. They lost access to health care, day care, transportation, and groceries. Our Fremont site sustained a break-in (fortunately with only minor damage). These events all combined with the pandemic to magnify the racial and health equity issues that have long plagued our communities.

And again, our incredible staff was there to respond (are you seeing a trend here?). We partnered with a North Minneapolis church to provide food and supplies to over 800 families during two distributions at our Fremont location in June and July. The impact of these events have led our organization to rededicate ourselves to making lasting improvements in our care processes and customer interactions to positively impact the health disparities experienced by our communities.

And so I will end my remarks here. I cannot stop recognizing the efforts of our staff, board and volunteers. More than any moment in our organizational history, their incredible efforts have led our ability to sustain our Mission throughout these once in a generation challenges. Thank you too to our community partners, grant funders, vendors and community members for your sustained support; both moral and financial. I ask that you continue to stand with us as we progress through the coming challenges.

I could have never imagined living through such a time, personally and professionally. I know you all share these similar experiences.

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