

The Health Care Neighborhood: Philanthropy's Role in Aging Well

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GETTING BEYOND THE BLIND SIDE

In football, the blind side refers to the side of the quarterback that is left vulnerable as he prepares to throw with his opposite arm. Because the quarterback can't see the full picture, he must rely on his teammates to provide coverage so he can complete the pass and advance the team downfield.

Health care also has a blind side. According to a 2011 survey conducted on behalf of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, four out of five primary care physicians do not feel confident in their capacity to meet their patients' social needs, and they believe this impedes their ability to provide quality care (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2011). Despite evidence that social determinants such as education, employment, and economics can influence health outcomes, a service coordination gap remains. How can we bridge health care and social services in order to provide patients with seamless, comprehensive care?

According to the Institute of Medicine, cross-sector collaboration can provide vital coordination between medical care and long-term services and supports, and is recommended to achieve better care at lower cost (Smith et al. 2013). As physicians quarterback their patients' medical needs, community-clinical partnerships can address the blind side. But as grantmakers, what is our role on the team? How can we facilitate a network of both traditional and nontraditional partners to achieve healthier outcomes for individuals, families, and communities? For Community Memorial Foundation and its partners, the development of a shared vision to collectively transform the western suburbs of Chicago into the healthiest region of the country led to an evolution of some of the foundation's program areas. By moving from reactive responsiveness to strategic community engagement, Community Memorial Foundation became a catalyst for change, the type of which is exemplified by the creation of an Older Adult Health Neighborhood.

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

Since 2007, Community Memorial Foundation has supported the Aging Resource Center (ARC) at AMITA Health Adventist Medical Center in LaGrange, Illinois. The ARC is

facilitated by Aging Care Connections, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of older adults and their families. It offers on-site assessment for in-home services; the option for follow-up in the patient's home; community resources, such as benefits assistance, transportation, and adaptive equipment; as well as health information and educational materials. The ARC emerged from a unique, cross-sector partnership between a private philanthropic organization (the foundation), a health care system (AMITA Health), and a local nonprofit organization (Aging Care Connections), and it uses the evidence-based Bridge Model of Transitional Care to link patients and their families with the resources they need to successfully transition home. Developed by Rush University Medical Center's Health and Aging program and Aging Care Connections, the Bridge Model is a person-centered, social work-led, interdisciplinary model of care that has been proven to significantly lower readmission rates, increase attendance at post-discharge appointments, and decrease stress for both patients and family caregivers.

Bridge intervention at the Medical Center has significantly reduced all-cause readmissions. In 4th quarter 2015, the Bridge readmission rate was 5.67 percent, outperforming the national average by nearly two-thirds (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). The program has expanded to six local skilled nursing facilities and two primary care medical groups. "Bridge's approach of coordinating both medical and social needs results in positive outcomes," says Robyn Golden, Director of Health and Aging at Rush University Medical Center, "and partnering with Community Memorial Foundation maximizes the opportunity for a servable moment."

For the foundation and its partners, the ARC serves as a powerful reminder that success is measured by our ability to meet the needs of our community and improve the lives of those we serve; but it also represents both an opportunity and a powerful call to action. Our community clearly had a need for improved and expanded coordination of services for older adults, not only for transitional care, but throughout the continuum of aging. To meet this need, the foundation's role would shift from grantmaker to changemaker.

THE SHIFT FROM GRANTMAKER TO CHANGEMAKER

The Aging Well Neighborhood (formerly the Older Adult Health Neighborhood) was created in 2014 as the next step toward collaboratively transforming the health care of aging adults in our community. Partnering with the Rush University Medical Center Health and Aging program and Aging Care Connections, the foundation helped create a network of 12 for-profit and nonprofit organizations to address everything from prevention to the needs of highly complex patients in danger of unnecessary hospitalization and poor health outcomes. The Neighborhood offers various types of long-term services and supports, ranging from personal care and meal delivery to transportation and home injury screenings. Each service provider is a team member who a) communicates with patients and other providers in a timely manner and b) coordinates care with sensitivity to both the medical and social needs of the patient. The Aging Well Neighborhood aims to help the patient navigate a complex system; effectively coordinate all care; and ensure that treatment plans from different providers work together as a whole. Since its inception, it has established a robust network of community entities that have successfully intervened with 287 older adults/caregivers. In addition to low hospital readmission rates, recent reports also show high levels of physician satisfaction and improved health literacy.

The Aging Well Neighborhood shares the foundation's vision that collaborative transformation can elicit positive health outcomes for local residents. To be successful, the Neighborhood requires community stakeholders from various sectors—business, faith-based, health care, nonprofit, philanthropic, and more—to take an active role in facilitating change. For the foundation, this meant a strategic examination of what it truly means to not only be a grantmaker, but also a changemaker. We understand that transformation does not happen overnight; nor can we call upon others to participate without also taking action ourselves. And so, with the support of our board of directors, the foundation has expanded its leadership role within the community, shaping a proactive discourse on health and health care, and promoting a culture of philanthropy. The foundation continues to play an active role in leveraging its grantmaking, as it did in securing a matching grant from AMITA Health Adventist Medical Center to fund the ARC program. It also helps secure the support of nontraditional Neighborhood partners like the West Suburban Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which recently collaborated with the Neighborhood for a training and advocacy program aimed at educating local businesses on how to accommodate the needs of their older adult clientele.

REGIONAL HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENDA

The foundation's shift from reactive responsiveness to strategic, proactive engagement has been incorporated into its strategic plan, which includes the creation of a newly

launched Regional Health and Human Services Agenda for the Western Suburbs. With the support of its community partners, the foundation aims to model the success of programs like the Neighborhood. It is our hope that by mobilizing community advisory councils and uniting businesses, nonprofit agencies, schools, and congregations in addressing Agenda priorities, we can achieve collective community impact.

Community Memorial Foundation believes that philanthropy is synonymous with change-making and community-building. This unwavering commitment to improve health outcomes, foster collaboration, and strengthen organizations within our region signaled a shift in the foundation's organizational identity. While grantmaking will always be at our core, Community Memorial Foundation is inspired and grateful for the opportunity to be an educator, a convener, and a catalyst for change. Metaphorically speaking, this evolution moves us from sitting on the sidelines to becoming playmakers on the field, running alongside our teammates in pursuit of our common goal: to empower all our neighbors to know that good health and wellness are within their reach.

Community Memorial Foundation gratefully acknowledges Aging Care Connections, AMITA Health Adventist Medical Center in LaGrange, Illinois, and Rush University Medical Center Health and Aging for their expertise and continued partnership.

To learn about the Regional Health and Human Services Agenda for the Western Suburbs of Chicago, please visit: www.cmfdn.org/regional-health-and-human-services-agenda.

SOURCES

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