

# Spotlight on the Safety Net

*A Community Collaboration  
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## Transitions of Care: Blue Ridge Community Health Services

Blue Ridge Community Health Services (BRCHS) is a Joint Commission-accredited community and migrant health center in Henderson County that has been working for almost 50 years to enhance the health of individuals and families in the region by improving access to health care. BRCHS offers a comprehensive scope of services to a wide range of clients and helps them transition from temporary, acute care settings to primary care and dental homes. In 2011, BRCHS provided more than 66,000 service encounters to 17,540 patients (10,921 of whom were uninsured, and 98% of whom lived below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines). BRCHS offers services through a provider staff consisting of 11 family medicine and pediatric providers, 4 dentists, 3 dental hygienists, a psychiatrist (also certified in addiction medicine), a psychiatric nurse practitioner, 4 licensed counselors (2 of whom are also licensed clinical addiction specialists), and a licensed dietitian. BRCHS also operates 4 school-based health centers, a dental outreach program, a 340B pharmacy and medication assistance program, and community and migrant-stream farmworker outreach and health education.

The overuse of emergency departments for primary dental care was a significant problem in Henderson County. One of the local hospitals, Margaret Pardee Memorial Hospital (Pardee), reported to BRCHS that in 2008, they had more than 600 emergency department visits for dental needs that would have been better served in a primary dental setting. Of those 600 dental visits, 430 were for uninsured individuals. Because emergency departments are ill-equipped to treat underlying dental issues, the treatment plans in this case addressed only pain relief with little treatment for the underlying dental care issue. Through a collaboration with Pardee, BRCHS is helping to streamline access to appropriate dental homes for patients who seek treatment through the emergency department. During BRCHS operating hours, dental patients who enter the hospital emergency department are assessed and immediately sent to BRCHS. After BRCHS hours or during the weekend, patients are given a limited amount of pain medication in the emergency department and referred to BRCHS. On the next business day, BRCHS staff follows up with patients to help them receive the dental care they need.

The BRCHS relationship with Pardee extends beyond helping patients with emergency dental problems. For several years, BRCHS has reserved at least 5 appointments each day for emergency department and hospital follow-up visits. Patients leaving the emergency department are guaranteed access to a follow-up visit at BRCHS. BRCHS appointment information is included in the hospital's discharge instructions. Knowing that patients will receive adequate and timely follow-up means emergency department physicians worry less about defensive medicine. The BRCHS chief medical officer and Pardee's physician leadership have regular meetings to ensure the transition of care system is working as efficiently as possible.

The relationship between BRCHS and Pardee continues to grow. The collaboration also includes care transitions for pregnant women moving from prenatal and perinatal care at BRCHS to Pardee for labor and delivery. *Clinica en el Campo* (Clinic in the Field) supports BRCHS physicians to work collaboratively with the Mountain Area Health Education Center - Hendersonville Family Practice Residency Program, sponsored by Pardee, to bring medical care to farmworkers in the fields and in housing camps. This program brings much-needed care to people and also extends the education of residents from beyond the traditional medical setting to the patient's environment, which creates a valuable learning experience.

BRCHS was awarded a grant through funds made available by the Affordable Care Act to construct a new 27,000-square-foot medical building, which opened in September 2011. The new building includes space for Pardee to provide laboratory and radiology services for BRCHS patients at the community health center so patients do not have to travel to the hospital for those services.

BRCHS also helps patients transition from acute specialty care with The Free Clinics of Henderson County to a primary care medical home at BRCHS. The Free Clinics focus on connecting patients with specialty care, providing acute care one night each week. Patients seen by the clinics are referred to BRCHS for continuing primary care. In return, patients at BRCHS are able to access specialty services through The Free Clinics.

In addition, BRCHS helps children transition from acute care within school-based health centers to a primary care medical home. Many children come to BRCHS for illness, minor injury, or sports physicals. If the child has a pediatrician, the records of the visit are shared with the child's medical provider to ensure the medical home is aware of the care received at the school-based health center. If the child does not have a medical home, they may receive comprehensive care from the school-based health center.

The safety net providers in Henderson County are working together to help transition patients to the most appropriate place for their care. The collaboration between the hospital, free clinic, and community health center is an illustrative model of using existing community resources to help patients receive the right care in the right place at the right time. NCMJ

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