



PROJECT ACCESS of WAKE COUNTY: A View from a Community Nurse Case Manager

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PROJECT ACCESS of Wake County (PAWC) is a physician-referral program serving the uninsured population where qualified enrollees can access care that they may not otherwise have been able to receive. PAWC grew out of our physician community's desire to more appropriately deliver healthcare to the low-income uninsured residents of Wake County. Modeled after a Buncombe County (Asheville, North Carolina) program, PAWC helps members of our community stay out of the emergency room and receive the myriad benefits associated with having a long-term medical home. The program launched in late 2000 with the leadership of local physicians and the support of the Wake County Medical Society. Physician and staff involvement are key to PAWC's ability to help our neighbors in need. PAWC is structured pro bono care with an infrastructure that provides local volunteer physicians an easy way to ensure that their donated care is going to help the neediest

members of our community. When physicians sign up with Project Access, they agree to a certain number of commitments, or new clients, they will accept in a given year. PAWC then provides a list of participating providers to the safety-net primary care clinics for the purpose of referring appropriate clients to these physicians. In 2015, over 2300 people received medical specialty care through the compassionate care of our physician volunteers. The generosity of these volunteers, along with the generous support of Duke Raleigh Hospital, UNC-Rex Healthcare, and WakeMed Health & Hospitals generated over \$16 million in donated care. Below is a story of one individual who received much needed medical services through the CapitalCare Collaborative, Project Access and other partners. Together we can make a difference, one life at a time!



A 42-year old veteran and a father of four children injured his lower back while working. This was his third injury to the same exact location of two previous injuries and this time, he had no financial assistance to help him with his medical needs. The third injury sent him on a very painful journey, both physically and emotionally. He lost his ability to be gainfully employed, suffered from depression, and became homeless. Healthcare for the homeless does not provide pain management for many reasons and often times; individuals suffer in silence utilizing emergency rooms and street drugs to soothe their pain.

Through a CapitalCare Collaborative case manager's referral to Project Access, this individual was able to receive treatment from an orthopedic doctor. This doctor considered performing a spinal fusion to alleviate his pain and fix his spine. A major surgery like this presents challenges for the homeless population because their treatment often stops once they leave the hospital. Shelters are typically unable to provide hands-on assistance of any kind and without insurance, homeless individuals do not have access to a rehabilitation facility. In addition, this individual experienced opiate addiction after his first surgery.

After exploring options, the doctor proceeded with a non-surgical treatment plan. The case manager reached out to Project Access again for guidance and their staff fast tracked his UNC Charity Application for Rex Pain management. The case manager and individual felt that if his pain could be controlled, he would have some quality of life and could do a more sedentary job. After a consult, follow-up, and careful review of his MRI, his pain doctor strongly recommended he have surgery and referred him to a Neurosurgeon. The individual and case manager left the office that day surprised that surgery was being put back on the table as an option and relieved that he would receive treatment that eventually resulted in



Right to left: Rosa Almanzar, Pam Carpenter, Bobbi Burns

a successful spinal fusion and stay in a rehab facility post-surgery for recovery. While this individual was in the rehab facility, the case manager received a long-awaited call from The Veterans of America notifying her of an opening for an apartment. The individual was discharged from the rehabilitation center into a furnished apartment with many services he could access.

Currently, this former Project Access enrollee remains in housing since his surgery, is off all pain medication, and is working with vocational rehab to prepare to return to work.

According to this case manager, "I honestly believe with Project Access, their services, and appreciation for urgent healthcare needs, this man would have spiraled back into addiction to treat his pain and missed out on treatment and housing." §

For more information about Project Access of Wake County, please contact Pam Carpenter, Program Manager at (919) 819-6281 or via email at: pcarpenter@wakedocs.org.

Project Access website:
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