

Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center: Michael Taylor, COO

by HCE Exchange on January 12, 2012



Community health centers face unique challenges and patient populations with perhaps a greater focus on their surrounding areas than many other healthcare organizations. Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center is a federally qualified community health center that has been serving residents of New Haven, Conn., neighborhoods since 1968. About 65 percent of patients receive Medicaid, and 58 percent are below the poverty line.

Seeing about 33,000 patients per year, the health center offers a range of programs including medical, dental, and behavioral health.

“We have one of the best models of integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health,” said Michael Taylor, chief operations officer. “We offer inpatient detox and outpatient intensive-therapy services. We are where everybody else wants to be.”

As with other healthcare organizations, Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center has implemented electronic medical records to attain meaningful use. The center implemented GE Centricity for medical and dental, but found that no one product had the depth needed for the behavioral-health services offered. The center was able to have GE collaborate with MindLinc from Duke University to offer an integrated medical record, with an in-depth behavioral-health product.

“The partnership is unique in that GE came to the table after recognizing they could benefit greatly from our deep understanding of behavioral health in a primary-care setting and the challenges of true integration,” Taylor said. “The opportunity to take our industry-leading knowledge and incorporate that into their product line is a great benefit to them. And of course, partnering with a global leader in healthcare technology gives us a certain sense of confidence in the outcome. We know the product will deliver results for our patients through efficiencies and more robust reporting capabilities.”

Growing with the community

The center was founded through a collaboration between the community and the Yale School of Medicine in 1968. Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center was the first community health center established in Connecticut and has come a long way since its origins. The center now has 16 care sites, numerous collaborations with other healthcare organizations, more than 550 employees, and an annual budget of \$52 million.

It has five school-based health centers and a dental school-based health center. The center offers programs including outreach to homeless individuals, birth-to-three services for developmentally delayed children, social/educational services to pregnant teenagers, HIV/AIDS education, a 29-bed drug and alcohol detoxification program, a 44-bed transitional shelter for homeless men, and a child and family-guidance clinic.

“We are no longer a mom-and-pop shop,” Taylor said. “We are raising the bar on skills and competencies of our employees and on quality. This takes significant infrastructure to make it work.”

Taylor has been a trainer for the National Association of Community Health Centers for years and said he regularly hears from health centers across the country about the challenges associated with recruiting and training staff, especially as the centers grow and add partnerships.

Health centers are evolving and for many community health centers, the training and skill development of staff

lagged behind for many years. Health centers now have such a dependency on technology, for example, that it has impacted hiring practices. It's also put a greater demand on the skill development of existing staff.

Additionally, everyone knows that primary care is in demand and there are simply not enough providers in the primary-care field. Most newly graduated medical-school students are pursuing specialty care for many reasons, chief among them being that they can get a greater return on their educational investment.

"While it is a challenge for all health centers to find and keep high-quality talent in primary care, we do have many advantages over other institutions," Taylor said. "These include programs that allow us to reimburse providers for educational costs, as well as absorb the costs of malpractice insurance which is one less expense for our providers."

Changes on the horizon

During the past two years, Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center has been making major changes. For the first time in its history, the center had a change in leadership with the addition of a new chief executive officer. Jamesina Henderson assembled a new executive team, and the center has made huge strides in improving the environment of care for patients.

Although quality is always a focus, Taylor said a major aspect of improving the environment of care was through staff training. He said all caregivers are receiving new training in customer service and communication skills.

"We want the employees who work here to passionately care about the people who walk through our doors and for that passion to show," he said.

The center is making many other operational changes as well from the way it hires staff to how it recruits providers. For the first time in 30 years, the center revised its sliding-fee discount program. Taylor said they are also looking at operating procedures and incorporating expectations into annual performance reviews.

Outreach is another shift made by the new executive team. Historically, Taylor said, the center hasn't spent as much effort in reaching out to educate the community about its services.

"We're reintroducing this organization to the communities we serve so we are better positioned to be available and be known by those who can benefit from our presence here," he said.

Through these efforts, Taylor said he sees the organization becoming a larger player within the state and offering other specialties the community needs.

"Community healthcare is an industry in transition," Taylor said. "The founders of this movement back in the late sixties are relinquishing control to a new collection of people who bring vast experience from both the non-profit and the for-profit sectors. They have new skills, and they are helping organizations like ours take the next step in their evolutions.

"As leaders in this field we need to be cognizant of the ever-increasing need for employees that come with a baseline skill set that includes customer service, flexibility, and adaptability, because this industry is constantly changing."

-by Patricia Chaney

Read the article on the healthcareix.com website >>>

