

## Dr. Janelle Goetcheus Receives National Recognition for Her Service to Homeless Patients

Columbia Road Health Services' founder, Dr. Janelle Goetcheus, was honored by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council with a "Distinguished Service Award" for her lifetime of dedication to serving the health care needs of the homeless in Washington, DC. Not only has Dr. Goetcheus provided health care to thousands of individuals, but she has also been a strong advocate on the local and national levels for changes to policies that impact the lives and health care of homeless persons.

The award was presented on June 23, 2011 at the National Health Care for the Homeless Conference and Policy Symposium at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Washington, DC. More than 800 health care providers, social workers, and homeless advocates stood and applauded Dr. Goetcheus for her 30 years of deep commitment and great compassion in serving homeless patients in Washington, D.C.

Vincent A. Keane, President and CEO of Unity Health Care, stated, "On behalf of Unity, we are so proud of Dr. Goetcheus. In the 20 plus years that I've known her, her passion toward serving the homeless men and women in



*CRHS founder Dr. Janelle Goetcheus speaks to more than 800 providers, social workers, and homeless advocates as she is recognized for dedicating her life to caring for those who are homeless or at risk for homelessness in Washington, DC.*

our nation's capital is truly profound." He added, "This award recognizes Dr. Goetcheus' inspiring leadership, her integrity, and her compassion for the condition of those who are medically vulnerable, and we congratulate her on this much deserved award."

Dr. Goetcheus founded CRHS in 1979, and ever since, CRHS has provided comprehensive health care for the medically underserved residents of Washington, DC. Among her many accomplishments, Dr. Goetcheus is the founder of Christ House, a respite care facility

for homeless men and women who are ill. She is also the co-founder of Unity Health Care, formerly known as the Health Care for the Homeless Project, where she currently holds the position of Chief Medical Officer and Executive Vice President of Medical Affairs.

In 1985, when the Health Care for the Homeless program was established under grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJ) and Pew Charitable Trust (Pew), Dr. Goetcheus was involved from the beginning. She provided ... "Award" continues on page 2

# Meet Robin Berlin, Our New Psychiatrist

In August 2011, CRHS welcomed a psychiatrist to our staff, Dr. Robin Berlin. Dr. Berlin came to us after having worked at Christ House, our nearby sister organization, from 2007 to 2009, and most recently having spent two years in Ecuador. Dr. Berlin earned a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology at Duke University and a medical degree from Georgetown University. After a preliminary internship in internal medicine at Washington Hospital Center, Dr. Berlin completed her residency in psychiatry at The George Washington University.

Since medical school, Dr. Berlin knew she wanted to work with an underserved population in a family practice setting. "I was drawn to CRHS because of its mission, and my work at Christ House solidified my decision to work here. After spending two years in Ecuador, I heard about the merger with Unity Health Care, and I really wanted to come back and work at CRHS. I was lucky enough that a psychiatrist position was created."

Dr. Berlin's first two months at CRHS have gone smoothly, and she feels that she has already gained a wealth of knowledge. She particularly enjoys her daily interactions with

patients and seeing their gradual improvements through follow-up appointments.

While Dr. Berlin is fluent in Spanish, she says "CRHS has a diverse patient population; there are so many languages" including Amharic, an Ethiopian language. Dr. Berlin has traveled extensively, living and studying in South and Central America and working in Africa, which has allowed her to gain knowledge and insight for providing services in a multicultural context such as found at CRHS.

Dr. Berlin's services at CRHS complement those of Debra Vekstein, our mental health counselor, bolstering the mental health services we offer. While Debra works on prevention through talk therapy in her role as a counselor, Dr. Berlin addresses mental illnesses through a combination of counseling and medication management. In addition to her part-time responsibilities at CRHS, Dr. Berlin works at Upper Cardozo Health Center, a Unity Health Care clinic located just a few blocks from CRHS.

The addition of Dr. Berlin is a significant step forward for CRHS as we implement changes associated with the patient-centered medical home (PCMH) model. One of the hallmarks of the PCMH is to offer a

variety of essential services, such as those provided by Dr. Berlin, under one roof. A goal is to improve continuity of care from one visit to the next, and having a psychiatrist on site where patients already feel at home can contribute to this goal. "We know improved continuity of care will be very valuable to our patients here at CRHS" says mental health counselor Debra Vekstein.

According to Debra, "Dr. Berlin is a great addition to CRHS, filling a void and providing expertise that will make a difference in the lives of many CRHS patients." We welcome Dr. Berlin and are grateful for the knowledge and enthusiasm she brings to the staff and patients. 📍



*Psychiatrist Robin Berlin enjoys her daily interactions with patients and seeing their mental health improve.*

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guidance to all the grant recipients on how to create models of care that would maximize access for homeless persons, who then for the first time had a targeted health care system to address their unique health and social welfare needs. The funding provided by RWJ and Pew assisted in establishing homeless health care programs in 19 major cities

throughout the U.S. Some years later these programs were expanded through federal funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Today there are 208 homeless health care programs, serving more than a million patients nationwide.

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council continues its efforts to improve the health of

homeless people and advocate for housing, health care, and adequate incomes for all. The Council brings together agencies and individuals, clinicians and advocates, homeless and non-homeless people for mutual support and learning opportunities and to advance the cause of human rights. 📍

# Meet Jorge\*

Jorge came to CRHS for the first time in September with feelings of emptiness and despair that would not go away. He felt exhausted all the time, yet he was sleeping more than ever. He had difficulty getting out of bed in the morning and just wanted to hide under the covers. Jorge lost interest in his hobbies, his friends, and even basic things like eating. As a result of his decreased appetite, he lost a significant amount of weight.

When Jorge started missing days from work, a coworker of his, who is a patient at CRHS, noticed that something was not right. This coworker sat down and talked to Jorge one day at work to find out what was going on in Jorge's life. The coworker informed him about a time when he had been depressed and had received help from his doctor at CRHS.

Shortly after talking to his coworker,

Jorge visited our health center and talked to CRHS provider Dr. Chacko about how he was feeling. During the checkup, Dr. Chacko noticed Jorge's symptoms of depression and referred him to our psychiatrist, Dr. Berlin, who is an expert in treating depression.

Jorge is now seeing Dr. Berlin once a month and taking medicine for depression. He is also seeing CRHS' mental health counselor, Debra Vekstein, for talk therapy sessions. These sessions are a powerful tool in fighting depression and help Jorge learn ways to cope with this illness in his everyday life.

Jorge has experienced a gradual improvement in his mental state and is feeling much better about life. He no longer regularly misses days from work. The staff at CRHS have high hopes for Jorge now that he is addressing his depression and, as a result, finding more meaning in his job and his life. 📍

-Donna Chacko  
CRHS Physician

\*In order to maintain confidentiality, this patient's name and certain other identifying details have been changed



*Mother and son in the second floor waiting room reading donated books.*

## ***Stroke Education at CRHS In-Service***

CRHS holds monthly in-service training sessions for its entire staff on a wide variety of issues that affect the clinic and our patients. The October in-service provided education about the third leading cause of death in the United States: strokes. Maliha Ali, Research Coordinator and Stroke Educator at Georgetown University, educated our staff about this major health problem for which many of our patients are at risk.

Ms. Ali explained the difference between the two major types of stroke: ischemic stroke and hemorrhagic stroke, while highlighting the detection, prevention, and treatment of a stroke. Staff learned about the

intravenous drug tPA and how it can improve stroke outcomes by breaking up the clot that is blocking the blood flow to the brain in an ischemic stroke. Ms. Ali also focused on the importance of noticing the initial signs of an onset stroke, emphasizing the need for fast medical treatment.

Ms. Ali informed the staff that the leading controllable risk factors for stroke are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, cigarette smoking, diabetes, poor diet and physical inactivity, and being overweight or obese. She described the range of hospital locations in Washington, DC that are certified stroke centers which includes Georgetown University, so CRHS staff can refer patients for resources best targeted to their

stroke care needs.

“Overall, the African-American population suffers more strokes than any other group of people,” said Ms. Ali. She highlighted the crucial need for more effective education targeted to our urban African-American population on the symptoms of stroke and actions they must take in order to get proper treatment right away.

“This session was quite valuable in bringing awareness to the recognition of, course of action for, and the treatment of strokes” said Rona Schwartz, a CRHS physician. “This is definitely an issue that affects the patients we serve at CRHS. What we learned today will help our staff spread information about stroke recognition to patients as well as family and friends”. 📍

### ***CRHS Wraps up Final Phase of Renovations !***

Over the past five months, CRHS has undergone a major renovation of its facility, all while maintaining regular hours of service. In September, the final phase of renovation was completed. This final stage included a new reception desk that has resulted in more space in the waiting room, wheel chair accessibility, and privacy barriers for patients checking in and checking out.

“The new reception desk renovations have really improved the patient experience,” said Arody Vasquez, a CRHS patient registra-

tion clerk. “If patients want to just rest a minute during patient registration, the new front desk provides a comfortable place to sit down,” she says.

CRHS would like to send a special “thank you” the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 for funding this renovation and to all the contractors who worked diligently on this project for allowing us to improve our service to patients through the cost-effective and creative redesign of our clinic space. ♻️



*CRHS Patient Registration Clerks Arody Vasquez, Evelyn Canales, and Nayely Ventura smile as they prepare for patients at the new reception desk.*

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*Two young patients read as they wait for a well-child check.*

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