

THE UNION

February 10, 2015

Hospital grant helps improve health of at-risk population

From left: Kimberly Parker, executive director of SNMH Foundation, presents a check to representatives from grant collaborators Christina Frye of CoRR, Kelly Cirner of Western Sierra Medical Center and Christine Norwood of FREED.

Three local nonprofits working in collaboration to help medically at-risk populations in western Nevada County will share \$63,000 in grant funds awarded for 2015 by the Dignity Health Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital (SNMH) Community Grants Program.

Debra Wagner, RN, director of business development for the hospital, said the scope of the grants would cover access to primary care as well as behavioral health services.

“This year’s grant basically extends the collaborative partnerships that began with support from last year’s grant,” she said. “The organizations involved have demonstrated success in their first year and we wanted to provide the opportunity to build on that success.”

Through the grant program, SNMH encourages local nonprofit organizations to partner with each other and the hospital to identify and work to resolve community health challenges, Wagner explained.

The FREED Center for Independent Living was awarded \$41,000 of the total and will serve as the fiscal organization to administer the grant money. Grants of \$11,000 each were made to Community Recovery Resources (CoRR) and Western Sierra Medical Center (WSMC). CoRR maintains programs to aid individuals and families with substance use and behavioral health issues while WSMC is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) providing primary health, dental and behavioral health care services.

One of the goals for this year’s grant collaborators is to reduce hospital readmissions by coordinating care.

Through the grant, FREED employs a Care Transitions Coach who assists hospital patients who have been identified as being at high risk for readmission, in navigating to a variety of resources in the community. The coach helps determine whether a patient may need additional primary care, transportation, home delivered meals, personal care, mental health care or other services after they are discharged.

Patients are also encouraged to enroll in a care transition program in which they receive at least one home visit and several follow up phone calls during the 30 days after hospital discharge.

Ana Acton, executive director at FREED, shared that the re-admittance rate for patients enrolled in FREED's Care Transition Intervention programs dropped from 10.5 percent to 3.7 percent in the past year. The program provides coaching about medication management, using health records, connecting with physicians or specialists, and identifying red flags for health conditions.

Another important aspect of the collaboration is the co-location of primary care and substance abuse services at the CoRR campus. A 2013/2014 survey of CoRR clients revealed that one-third of the organization's clients had not had an appointment with a primary care provider for at least two years and nearly half did not have a primary care provider.

Since opening clinical services at CoRR in July 2014, WSMC has provided 141 individuals with primary health care services. The majority of these patients indicated that they had not had primary health care since childhood and many used the emergency department as their primary source of health care.

"The Dignity Health grant supports a 'no wrong door' approach to service provision with a goal of streamlining access to services for individuals," Acton said. "Because we are all working together, we can make 'warm hand-offs' to each other so that patients benefit from the variety of resources we provide."

She explained that a "warm hand-off" is accomplished when a staff member personally connects a patient with someone at one of the organizations for follow up, rather than just providing a phone number to call. This helps ensure that patients are scheduled for appointments or immediately connected to helpful resources.

"We are very proud of this collaboration and of all the work that has gone into connecting and aligning patients and services throughout our community," Wagner said.

All physicians providing care for patients at SNMH are members of the medical staff and are independent practitioners, not employees of the hospital.