



To Doctors Who Help Our Community Members Experiencing Homelessness: Thank You

In 1996 Dr. Donald Barr, then a physician with the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, along with Dr. Lars Osterberg from the VA, saw a need for safe housing and medical care to support those experiencing homelessness in Palo Alto.

Dr. Barr convened the working group that would eventually oversee construction of a supportive housing complex and drop-in day center (the Opportunity Center) and the creation of a not-for-profit healthcare organization (Peninsula Healthcare Connection) — both dedicated to helping meet those needs.

As the president and CEO of PHC, I'd like to honor Dr. Barr this Doctor's Day and celebrate all the physicians who have helped us provide primary care and support services from our two-room clinic since we opened our doors in 2006.

Founded as a joint venture with Sutter's Palo Alto Medical Foundation, the history of PHC has always included PAMF. Not only has PAMF funded our Chief Medical Officer position for the past 18 years, but the role of CMO has always been filled by a physician from the Palo Alto Foundation Medical Group.

Each CMO has challenged themselves to make our tiny clinic mighty and I'd like to thank them publicly:

Dr. Patty McGann, as our first CMO your work was cut out for you.

You got us onto the EPIC electronic medical record, helped us secure our state license and obtained investment from PAMF for the part-time medical assistant position that we've had since 2011. You also set the standard that all CMOs have since followed: up to 12 hours per week devoted to PHC, a portion of which can be spent caring for patients.

But perhaps your most lasting contribution was your conviction that we needed to promote the innate dignity of every person we treat. I watched patients walk taller when they left your exam room, their pride and confidence restored, because they admired you and you cared about them. We pride ourselves on fostering a positive environment, where people can unshoulder the stigma they carry from society and feel worthy of care and concern—and in many ways this philosophy started with you.



Peninsula Healthcare Connection's two-room medical clinic is located on the ground floor of the Opportunity Center.

Dr. Enoch Choi, your ability to connect with patients propelled our little clinic to expand its scope and put us on a course we're still pursuing today.

In general, our clients' health needs aren't unique. It's the same diabetes, high blood pressure, allergies, sleep problems, and stress that all primary care providers hear about. But you listened longer, until you learned about living conditions, clothing and food needs, transportation challenges and traumas.

It was clear that medicine alone wouldn't make our clients healthy. But at the time, our ability to offer wrap-around support, case management and referrals for more than housing was limited. You were with us when that all changed. In 2013 we started our Community Outreach program and merged with New Directions—a community-based provider of behavioral health, case management and psychosocial supports. These are still widely used and highly effective parts of our organization today.

Dr. Haleh Sheikholeslami, with over eight years of service to PHC, you were our longest tenured CMO and the rock we came to rely on.

You saw us through our application to become a Federally Qualified Health Center Look-Alike, which allows us to be paid for services provided to Medicare and Medicaid patients, receive drug discounts and other benefits. You also acted as our liaison to Stanford, which brought a new pool of physicians to our clinic schedule in 2021. Under your leadership we were able to open full-time, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

You were here far more than the hours you were paid, and your commitment inspired generosity from others, including your own daughters who came to volunteer. Dr. Sarah Robinson and physician assistant Kathleen Erickson, both from PAMF, also donated their time to the clinic and we thank them too.

Outside of your leadership and selflessness I will always remember your bedside manner with patients. You treated everyone with dignity, empathy and kindness—and many still ask for you by name.

Dr. Ed Yu, to this day I can't believe we had the Vice President of Value and Population Health at PAMF consult with us about the unique needs of our clients and clinic. You got us thinking about new ways we can use our EHR to better serve our patients, accurately track our work and tell our story with greater detail.

We are so proud to have expertise and guidance from someone of your stature – it's raised our bar. And you have brought your entire leadership team along with you in their devotion to those experiencing homelessness. You were even our Interim CMO, until you could hire the head of Population Health.

Dr. Navneet Singh, in you we found the promoter and mentor we didn't know we needed.

After your first clinic tour, you were already telling people about us and the unique gap we fill serving those experiencing homelessness in northern Santa Clara County and southern San Mateo County. In your Interim CMO role you advocated for us, and even though you're no longer our "Chief" we know you're still our champion.

You have also been an advisor and collaborator, helping us see social determinants of health through a new lens and prepare our own health equity strategy.

I look forward to opportunities on the horizon, like hosting students in service-learning projects, that will bring us together again. Meanwhile, I'll remember to channel your curiosity and optimism when I'm faced with a new challenge.

Dr. Sangeeta Kopardekar, six months on the job, and you've already had a huge impact.

I call you my mini-CEO because you're always looking for where we have gaps and make it your mission to see them filled.

Early in your time with us you recognized that we needed a consistent clinician here every day, for shift coverage but also continuity of care. You made the case and secured a community benefit investment from PAMF to cover the salary for a part-time nurse practitioner.

Then you found and trained our newest employee, Joanna Wisehart, NP, and the difference has been huge. Just three months after Joanna arrived we doubled the number of patients we saw, from the prior three months, and now have all of our provider slots filled Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.!

I know you have more plans for our growth, and I welcome it!

My sincere thanks, to each of you, for all the ways you've inspired me, our PHC team and all of those in our care and for all that you've invested in this clinic!



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