Making It Easy To Manage Diabetes

One out of every 11 people in the United States—or about 29.1 million people—have been diagnosed with diabetes in the United States, while one in four people remain undiagnosed and untreated. But providing quality medical care to these patients is just one part of the equation. In order for patients to more easily adopt the healthy habits that sustain wellness, Erie Family Health Center also offers free, monthly diabetes education classes—called Diabetes Month-by-Month.

Diabetes Month-by-Month provides a way for diabetic or prediabetic patients to cultivate a deeper understanding of their illness within the safety of a support group. Together, and with the support of a health educator or provider, the group navigates monthly topics such as stress management, grocery shopping, nutrition, complications that can result from diabetes, and more.

Liliana Luna, Diabetes Health Educator at Erie’s West Town location, works closely with Erie’s health care providers to identify patients who may benefit from Diabetes Month-by-Month. After a patient’s medical appointment, the provider might ask Luna to step in to meet with the patient. “Providers will say, ‘I have a patient here whose A1c levels are really high—can you tell them what changes they need to start making?’” And that’s when she tells patients about the free class.

“It’s a really big issue,” continued Luna. “If I teach them how to eat accordingly and also teach them how to manage to have lower levels of glucose, then they don’t have to take as much medication. Maybe we see them once every six months.”

The beginning of November brought on Erie-wide celebrations in recognition of Diabetes Awareness Day. At Erie West Town, Luna handed out healthy morning snacks in the waiting area, led an open aerobics exercise class, and held a Diabetes Month-by-Month session called ‘Ask the Provider.’ In this session, patients had the opportunity to ask Erie Family Nurse Practitioner Julie Osborne diabetes-related questions.

But it’s when patients take what they’ve learned throughout the class and apply it in their lives that they are truly able to take charge of their own health, as well as the health of their families. Thirty-two-year-old Clara* is just one example of a patient whose quality of life improved through the class. Clara was overweight and had high glucose levels when she first started Diabetes Month-by-Month in June of this year. Since then, she has completely transformed her eating habits, lost weight, and taught her husband and children how to eat healthier, too.

“Seeing patients being able to manage their diabetes without taking medications like insulin and living a normal life…that’s really powerful for me,” said Luna. “That’s the most rewarding part of my job.”

*Name changed to protect patient’s privacy
Women’s Health Receives Transformational Gift

Erie is honored to receive a $2.3 million grant from the Hospira Foundation to support its expanding Breast and Cervical Cancer Continuum of Care Program. This major gift leaves a legacy of support from the Hospira Foundation for women’s health and cancer care, funding capital infrastructure and launching the first endowment at Erie Family Health Center.

Erie’s Breast and Cervical Cancer Continuum of Care Program enables low-income women to seamlessly access breast and cervical cancer screening, preventative treatment, diagnostic support, referral to specialty and in-patient care, and psychosocial support services. For those who are diagnosed, Erie empowers women with comprehensive and coordinated support designed to maximize their prospects for long-term, disease-free survival.

The need among the communities that Erie serves is great. The combination of high levels of poverty and lack of English language skills results in significant financial, linguistic and cultural barriers to cancer care, screening and treatment. Seventy-three percent of Erie’s patients are Hispanic. Owing to a lack of access to regular screening, uninsured Latinas are two to three times more likely to have cancer diagnosed at a later stage, increasing their risk for cancer-related morbidity and mortality. At Erie, the goal is to provide a continuous, interlinked network of services to encourage early detection of breast and cervical cancers through screening, preventative care, supported linkage to specialty cancer care, and compassionate support services.

The remarkable support from the Hospira Foundation, with the endowment that it establishes, ensures that Erie will be able to care for women in need for many years into the future. The Hospira Foundation was the philanthropic affiliate of Hospira, Inc. Hospira, Inc. was acquired by Pfizer Inc. in September 2015.

Erie HealthReach Waukegan Receives LEED Certification

Two years ago, an empty, asphalt-dominated parking lot and a vacant bank sat at 2323 Grand Avenue in Waukegan. Now that location offers an altogether different experience: vegetated “islands” dress up the lot, while abundant flora and a new two-story display window welcome the Waukegan community to the energy- and water-efficient Erie HealthReach Waukegan Health Center.

Fresh air and natural light filled the facility’s community health room as employees, city officials, and building team members celebrated the old bank turned community health center’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council on October 29th. The LEED designation commends green buildings that save money and resources, achieve energy efficiency, and enhance occupant health.

“Since its founding nearly sixty years ago, Erie Family Health Center has emphasized community health,” said Lee Francis, President and CEO. “The LEED certification strengthens this commitment by extending it to the physical building and the environment.”

The project, designed by Legat Architects and built by Skender Construction, marks the first LEED certified facility in Waukegan and the first of Erie Family Health Center’s thirteen locations to achieve the certification.

Among the facility’s sustainable features are a much
more efficient mechanical system, low-energy lights, and low-consumption plumbing systems.

Legat Architects’ Derek Dunn, project manager, said, “The very nature of this project—transforming a dated facility from one use into another—demonstrates the principle of reuse at the heart of sustainability. We’re grateful to Erie Family Health Center for embracing LEED and setting an example in the health care and Waukegan communities.”

Article written by Legat Architects.

Dentist Spotlight: Lisa Kearney, DDS

Dr. Kearney’s desire to become a dentist began early. Growing up, she had a good relationship with her dentist and decided that providing dental care to patients was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life.

Soon she was on the way to realizing that dream. Dr. Kearney received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999 and graduated with honors from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) College of Dentistry in 2003. After graduating, she worked as an Associate Dentist in a family practice for three and a half years.

After a while, she began looking for other ways to fulfill her professional goal of giving back to the community. When a colleague told her that Erie Family Health Center was hiring, Dr. Kearney felt like that would be a better fit. She applied for the position and came on board as a dentist in March 2007.

After working in private practice, her experience at Erie was eye-opening. “I was seeing things like baby bottle decay—things I’d never seen before in private practice and never thought I would have to treat,” said Dr. Kearney. Dental decay is a preventable disease, and Dr. Kearney took the initiative to better understand and educate her mostly Spanish-speaking patients on the importance of oral health care. Dr. Kearney signed up for a 12-week crash course in Spanish and learned Spanish dental terminology from her patients and colleagues.

When Erie’s previous dental director left in 2012, Dr. Kearney was asked to take over in the interim. While at first hesitant and uncertain of how she would fare in this leadership role, Dr. Kearney let her passion for providing quality dental care to patients guide how she carried out the duties entrusted to her in her new position.

In this role, she is growing the program and participating in national efforts to build oral health at community health centers. She joined a collaborative with five other dental health centers to discuss how to measure and compare data on oral health quality indicators—a process that, while already implemented for medical care, had not been explored for dentistry. Dr. Kearney soon became an integral figure in implementing a process for tracking oral health outcomes at Erie. Now dental providers at other community health centers have a way to measure their impact. This has enhanced quality improvement efforts as well as the ability to report our successes to key stakeholders.

In addition to her leadership responsibilities as dental director, Dr. Kearney volunteers as an adjunct faculty preceptor for the UIC College of Dentistry, teaching and supervising students in clinics, and she regularly speaks at a number of national conferences about the success of Erie’s new medical-dental integrated care model.

Erie, as well as the patients Erie serves, is truly grateful to have Dr. Kearney as a dentist, devoted advocate, and leader. Her upbeat, energetic personality has not only inspired us, but also inspired our patients to become more active in their own oral health care.
Save the Date:
Eriedescence 2016

Thursday, March 10, 2016
6-9 p.m.
Ovation Chicago
2324 W. Fulton
Chicago, IL 60612

Hosted by the Erie Family Health Center Auxiliary Council

Come light up the night with us at Eriedescence 2016 as we raise money for Erie’s health and wellness programs.

There’s a little something for everyone; food, drinks, a silent auction, raffle, wine grab bag, and more!

Buy your tickets today at eriefamilyhealth.org/eriedescence

Patient Spotlight: TJ

TJ’s* summer break was interrupted when he started having seizures. When the new school year began at Laura S. Ward Elementary in Humboldt Park, the seventh grader lived in fear that a seizure could strike at any moment.

This anxiety caused him to give up the sports he loved, like basketball. Seeking comfort and a safe place, he frequently wandered in to Erie Westside Health Center, one of Erie Family Health Center’s five Chicago Public School-based locations.

The nursing and provider staff at Erie was concerned about TJ. They consulted neurologists and helped his parents schedule MRIs and other necessary testing. Test results revealed the source of TJ’s seizures: a 2.5 centimeter brain tumor.

This is devastating news for any family to face. Thankfully, TJ’s tumor was benign, and surgery successfully removed it. TJ was able to return to the seventh grade two months later.

Erie’s providers were just down the hall from TJ’s classroom when he needed follow-up care. When the fear of being hit in the head near his incision site gave TJ anxiety, Erie’s behavioral health therapist was steps away from the gym and ready to assist with coping strategies. Today, TJ is now free of seizures, full of confidence and back on the basketball court.

Like Erie Westside at Ward Elementary, each of Erie’s 13 health centers is located in an area that lacks medical resources for those in financial need. Before they found Erie, our patients faced barriers to health care like poverty, lack of insurance, geographic inaccessibility, inflexible hours, and language differences. Before they found Erie, many of our patients worried they had nowhere to go.

Your contribution ensures that Erie’s services will remain accessible and affordable for anyone who needs them. This holiday season, give kids like TJ the gift of a safe place, peace of mind, and hope for a healthier future.

If you have a question about donating to Erie or the programs your support helps make possible, please contact Kate Birdwell at 312.432.7440 or e-mail her at kbirdwell@eriefamilyhealth.org.

*Name changed to protect patient’s privacy.