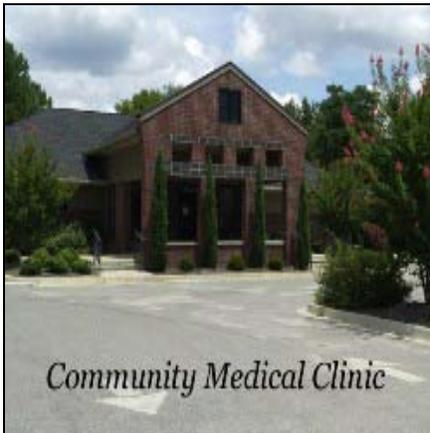


South Carolina Hospital Association

■ *best practice report*

*partnering for a healthier community: kershaw county*



**"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." -**

***Helen Keller***

Kershaw County's safety-net providers have a long history of collaboration and partnerships. Leadership of the Community Medical Clinic (the free clinic), Sandhills Medical Foundation (the Federally Qualified Community Health Center) and KershawHealth (the local hospital) have partnered together on several initiatives over the last 10 years. They have created a strong patient referral network, have shared an electronic database of mutual patients and have created many other strategic partnerships.

One such strategic partnership between the Community Medical Clinic (CMC), Sandhills Medical Foundation, KershawHealth, the local Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Alpha Center (the local behavioral health agency) has been the development of Access Kershaw. The mission of Access Kershaw is to coordinate a medical home network of high quality care that results in better health outcomes and improved access to care. The network functions as a link between low income, high risk people and local health professionals and works to open doors to people in need of high quality and timely medical, dental, vision and behavioral health care. Before Access Kershaw, partners had established seemingly successful systems of care and collaborative partnerships. When asked *why* partners decided to pursue the Access Kershaw opportunity, Susan Witkowski explained that "each partner did what they could to manage the uninsured in our community. We referred patients and provided information about what our partners were doing, but we were never able to close the gap." Partners saw Access Kershaw as an opportunity to link their efforts, to offer additional support to patients and to provide effective and efficient management of community resources.

Access Kershaw is staffed by a Director (Kelly Warnock, Family Nurse Practitioner) and two Registered Nurses and housed in donated space from KershawHealth. Core services of the team include the following:

- Arranging for Primary Care Services
- Arranging for Behavioral Health Services
- Providing Case Management Services
- Assisting with applications for Pharmacy Assistance Programs
- Assisting with finding affordable specialty care
- Completing The Benefit Bank applications (SNAP, Medicaid and other services)
- Assisting with disability applications
- Providing life coaching

Access Kershaw receives funding and support from The Duke Endowment, AccessHealth SC and its safety net partners. Although operational for less than a year, the network has seen a swarm of early successes and has been able to provide support, not only to residents of Kershaw County, but to partners of the network.

The network leverages resources through strong relationships with partners. The Community Medical Clinic and Sandhills Medical Foundation have increased capacity through having Kelly occasionally provide care to patients at their respective organizations. At CMC, Kelly's services are considered volunteer but she does so because it helps her connect firsthand with potential clients of the network. Access Kershaw has a symbiotic referral relationship with both organizations. In addition to receiving medical home referrals from Access Kershaw, CMC and Sandhills often refer complex patients to the network and have discovered that the sharing of complex patients has also allowed both organizations to increase capacity. Access Kershaw also helps to fund a primary care practitioner in collaboration with Sandhills Medical Foundation at the local DMH facility. Co-locating primary

care and mental health services created a new medical home and better outcomes for patients.

The network has provided a link between the free clinic, the FQHC, private providers in the community, the local urgent care facility and the hospital's emergency department. Access Kershaw has done this by serving its referral and walk-in clients in three key areas:

- **Case management:** Management and support of the client by meeting his/her health and human service needs. The network conducts patient home visits, tracks Hemoglobin A1C, reviews patient weight management and medication, partners with clients to make diet and exercise changes, and conducts regular follow-up and other activities for patients that are being case managed.
- **Health navigation:** The network staff navigates clients by providing linkages to local resources and services. For instance, they complete applications through The Benefit Bank that connect clients to social service needs such as Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- **Care coordination:** Coordination allows the network staff to close the gap for clients and ensure they are connected to the appropriate resources. For example, Access Kershaw staff ensure that clients make their appointments and, complementing the medical home, coordinate any follow up appointments with the medical home and other community providers.

**Operational Design:** Staff of Access Kershaw are leased employees to Sandhills Medical Foundation. Sandhills administers paychecks, reimbursements and policies. Kershaw Health was the grant recipient from The Duke Endowment, so an agreement exists between the grantee (Kershaw Health) and Sandhills for managing and employing the Access Kershaw staff. Also, Business Associate Agreements (BAA) exists between Sandhills, Access Kershaw and network partners to allow the sharing of patient health information.

Kelly reports directly to the network's Board. The Board of Access Kershaw is structured under Kershaw Health and is comprised of members of Kershaw's safety-net. In addition to the original organizations brought together in the development process, patient referral patterns also help define organizations that should be members of the network's governing Board.

The network's design further enhances Access Kershaw's ability to provide support to all of its partners. Kelly Warnock regularly communicates with members of her Board and asks for their feedback and needs in the network's implementation. The strong relationship with the network's partners have allowed Access Kershaw to quickly respond to partners' needs and continue to strengthen the network's value to its partners.

For example, Access Kershaw has been able to expand its service population from only supporting uninsured to providing assistance to any low-income, at-risk person, regardless of insurance status. This network adjustment has been a value-add for the community by helping Access Kershaw to serve as a hub for *any* resident needing support in accessing health care. An additional benefit has been the network's expanded understanding of differing provider and partner client expectations. For example, the network's connection with community providers has given staff a better understanding of types of insurance accepted at different practices. Therefore, Access Kershaw can further streamline processes and provide efficiencies by being able to arm patients with the information that connect them to the *right care at the right time*.

**Future of network:** From the start, Access Kershaw benefited from the strong sense of collaboration already established in the Kershaw community. However, the network director built upon this benefit to further cultivate a relationship with partners and has been responsive to their needs. "Incorporating strategic measures to benefit the patient as well as the community was important to our network," said Susan Witkowski. "Our model to decrease unnecessary emergency room visits is to make sure uninsured patients have a

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medical home and a case manager to assist with their health plan.” One component of success comes from continued engagement at all levels and clearly communicated expectations from community partners. “We know that the formation of patient-centered medical homes with strong case management and coordination of care is essential to making a real difference for those in need. KershawHealth has always believed in the power of strategic partnerships to create a care network within our community,” notes KershawHealth President and CEO Donnie Weeks.

Kelly will continue to focus on building community transparency, leveraging resources among partners and increasing access to clients. Some key areas of focus for 2012 are increasing specialty services, enhancing data coordination, and developing a Return on Investment calculator, in partnership with AccessHealth SC, to continue to demonstrate the network’s financial benefit to the community.

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