Community health advocates embrace new database to connect patients with critical resources.

A world of support can begin with just one search.

At MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, the AccessHealth team, part of the Population & Community Health department, works with recently discharged hospital patients who have social barriers to receiving full care. The community health advocate (CHA) role was first established through grant funding in 2012 with a focus area of Lexington Park, but has since expanded to serve patients throughout St. Mary's County.

"Our community health advocates consider the many factors that could impact patients being able to access a full spectrum of care," says Brenda Wolcott, MPH, operations specialist, Population & Community Health. "They could be uninsured or underinsured, and maybe need help with the insurance application process. They might be without reliable transportation or experiencing homelessness. Our role is to connect them with resources that can help them improve their quality of life, which has clear and direct impacts on health."

"It's a door-opener—it provides more opportunities to help patients with support we might not have known was available."
—Brenda Wolcott, MPH

Letter from the president.

Dear Friends,

At MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, the Population & Community Health team is all about opening doors for others. And through the challenges of 2021, if a door didn't open, community health advocates found a window.

Our team works tirelessly to link patients to resources that build healthier lives. Highlighted in this report is a new database that's helping patients find support in many ways, even from afar.

We're here to help our community however we can. Thank you for your support.

Kind regards,

Christine R. Wray

Christine R. Wray, FACHE

Senior Vice President,
MedStar Health

President,
MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

It's how we treat people.

MedStar Health

As part of the post-discharge process, AccessHealth—comprised of three full-time CHAs and a driver—now conducts social needs screenings through findhelp.org. Based on the patient's responses, they will be linked to one or several of the verified 1,800-plus free or reduced-cost programs available to county residents through local and national partners.

"It's a door-opener—it provides more opportunities to help patients with support we might not have known was available," says Brenda. "We have outstanding local resources, but we can get very siloed by considering only resources in our immediate area. Findhelp has expanded our network and even helped us to book some appointments for patients faster."

Help isn't limited to St. Mary's County, or even the state of Maryland. A CHA was recently able to link a relocating patient to services in Florida ahead of their move.

"We once worked with a military veteran who was experiencing homelessness. He wanted to work, but couldn't, because he had no fixed address," Brenda shares. "One of our CHAs asked him about his time in the military, which he dismissed as 'just four years' of service. He wasn't aware that he was entitled to veterans' benefits." The advocate drove the individual to the Veterans Administration herself, where the patient received housing assistance that ultimately led to gainful employment—all thanks to that first conversation.

This is just one example of many Brenda shared. Over the years, the Population & Community Health department has developed a strong reputation as a trusted resource. "We were 411, back when there was 411," she jokes. "Community members still often call us and say, 'I know you're not the right one for this, but do you know where I can find . . .?' Maybe it's grief support, primary care, transportation. Whatever they need, we are happy to help. That's why we're here."
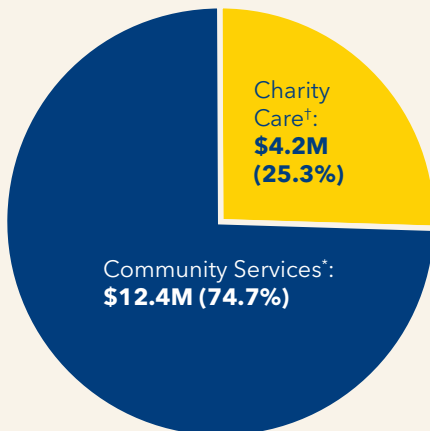
Population & Community Health at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

Fiscal Year 2021 at a glance
(Reporting July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021)

- **938** patients received care coordination services through nurses

- **693** patients with social needs were contacted by community health advocates

- **161** COVID-positive patients received follow-up phone calls after discharge, including patients from neighboring MedStar Health hospitals during pandemic surges

Charity Care†:
$4.2M (25.3%)

Community Services*:
$12.4M (74.7%)

2021 Community benefit contribution: $16.7M

*Includes subsidies, community health improvement services, community building activities, financial contributions, and community benefit operations
†Includes Medicaid assessments

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