



Message of HOPE

A Newsletter of Esperanza Health Center
Fall 2020

Esperanza means "hope." When the people who founded Esperanza Health Center chose our name over 31 years ago, they wanted to communicate hope to our patients and to our North Philadelphia community, where so many faced—and today continue to face—barriers to obtaining health care, including language.

In this edition of **Message of Hope**, we are sharing reflections by several staff members and a patient about how they have experienced hope through Esperanza in a year marked by many difficulties, disappointments and suffering.



HEIDI SYKORA, LSW *"Hope is still alive."*



Working during the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and election season has presented an interesting predicament for those of us in the behavioral health field: there seems to be a parallel process going on between ourselves and those we are seeking to support.

Families are struggling with logistics of online schooling, insomnia is pervasive, anxiety is off the charts.

We have seen death, we have seen rally cries for justice, we have seen destruction. We, along with our patients, are feeling tired, afraid, bored, stuck, lonely. To say 2020 has been difficult is putting it very kindly, and it can be hard to see where and how the Lord is at work amongst injustice, fear, isolation, even death.

But, we believe God is at work, even though we "see through a glass, darkly" as 1 Corinthians 13:12 tells us. We press onward, having faith that even our fatigue-laden efforts may bring some small relief and kindness to the patients we so dearly love. We pray that the listening ear we provide may help curb the loneliness of some and help them to feel heard, validated, loved. As we listen to confusion and unanswerable questions, we do our best to hold space for this. We do not have perfect answers, but we can offer our presence—and it turns out that presence is a powerful antidote to hopelessness. It helped one patient who was close to ending their life to not give up; helped another patient become more open to medication that could help improve their depression; and helped yet another feel human connection when they were sorely lacking this. We and our patients are weary, but Hope is still alive. May we cling to this hope even when all feels lost, naming beauty where we find it, and seek to bear one another's burdens well so as to sustain this sacred work set before us.

MARQUITA FARMER *"...even in the hardest of times, God is faithful and He uses others to uplift us..."*

I begin serving at Esperanza full-time toward the end of March. I was so excited to be joining such a wonderful organization and was looking forward to getting to know my coworkers and building good relationships here. But, my first day happened to also be the first day the city had begun a full lockdown. The halls at Esperanza were pretty empty and we were in the midst of figuring out how to adjust to serving patients through telehealth, and how to get staff set up to work remotely. I remember that first week feeling pretty out of sorts and uncertain. In the weeks following it began to feel increasingly lonely, from working remotely to not being able to see friends or my family or bond with my new coworkers.

But even during these very hard months, God has given me glimpses of hope that I have so desperately needed. It's been a gift to work with such amazing people! Even though I haven't met everyone personally at Esperanza, our virtual time together during devotions, mini-retreats, and prayer have sustained me. The times we have gotten to work together to figure out a "new normal" when nothing is certain has reminded me of just how powerful the body of Christ is. My entire family lives in Texas, so it has been incredible to come to Esperanza and feel so loved here, even by those I haven't met, and that continues to fill me with hope. Hope that even in the hardest of times, God is faithful and He uses others to uplift us and carry us through the various trials and tribulations we go through in life—even the ones we experience on a global scale. I've often been reminded of Romans 12:12, "Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer." My hope is that the Lord would continue to give me the grace to live this out in these trying times and that I would continue to be sensitive to the glimpses of hope He is giving.

SARA AND JONATHAN BUXTON *Seeing Thankfulness in Hundreds of Pairs of Eyes*

As newlyweds who transplanted to Philadelphia and began to work for Esperanza right before the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the Lord work in so many ways. During this extremely challenging time we have had the privilege and blessing of seeing the Lord move amongst the people in Philadelphia. Since both of us work with Esperanza, as a couple we have had the unique opportunity of sharing the same testimony of how Jesus has moved inside the walls of our clinics. We have both looked into hundreds of pairs of eyes and seen such thankfulness after being tested for a dangerous virus. We have heard the cries of sadness and brokenness during internal staff retreats centered around systemic racism. And by being invited into the dialogue of healing, we have been so encouraged by the message of hope that Jesus brings through His people and the empowerment He offers through His Holy Spirit into our lives to change us internally and to bring hope, love and life externally. - Sara Buxton, CRNP and Jonathan Buxton, RN, married 5/18/2019

MARIA GUZMAN *"People know that they can come here for help..."*

Our commitment to serve in sections of the city where some people want to move away from is evidence of how Esperanza wants to be in the middle of where we are needed—where hope is needed. When I think about our presence in North Philly and at our 5th Street location, where we serve a community of majority Hispanics, to me that is how Esperanza really shows hope, because we are not giving up on our people!

What the Kensington Dental Clinic did recently, providing dental care and doing outreach to our community outside behind the building, or how our HIV team goes to places throughout the city to conduct testing and also home-to-home visiting patients—all of that is Esperanza doing footwork. Something I love the most is knowing that most of our employees either live or once took residence in the communities near each of our sites. It shows that we are committed to our neighborhoods and it speaks volumes to how God has called us and we answered. People know that they can come here for help, however that may look: some come for mental health, physical health, help with family, seeking legal assistance, and more. It is amazing.

JENNIFER BALSAN, LCSW *Awareness of Our Own Need of Grace*



Within the last couple of weeks, I've worked with several patients who had not had a primary care provider in years or, for some, in decades. Each of them had experienced really significant trauma, and had some health issues that were important to be dealt with. It was beautiful to see the hope that people were starting to express when they realized that they had a doctor, and could make a plan to start to work on these issues. There was relief from being able to express their experiences and feelings, and just from feeling heard and understood. We realized that our behavioral health and physical health are intertwined in so many ways. So being able to address some of those behavioral health issues, such as stress and chronic depression or sub-clinical depression, and how these are interacting with chronic disease and other issues in life, has been pretty powerful.

I think what's really special about Esperanza is that because of our shared Christian faith as a staff, we come to all of these interactions first with an awareness of our own need of grace—and in addition, we come as we are in every encounter, whether that's with patients or with coworkers. As a staff, we bring with us that awareness that we are meeting with an image bearer of Christ.

REV. ANDRES FAJARDO *Representing a Practical Presence of Esperanza in Our Community*



Over the last 20 years, as a community pastor, Board member, patient and, for the last nine years, as Chaplain here, I have seen how Esperanza Health Center represents a practical presence of *esperanza—hope!*—in our North Philadelphia community. One recent chain of events represents to me how we partner with others—especially vulnerable neighbors for whom the health care system can be unfamiliar, complicated and expensive. I received a call from a local pastor, about a family whose teenage son had been informed that unless he updated his immunizations and had them documented by mid-November, he would not be allowed to continue at school.

However, the family wasn't sure what to do or whether they could afford care. With special assistance from our Hunting Park Office Manager, a new patient appointment was set up. A Volunteer Chaplain contacted the mom, picked up the family and accompanied them through the entire first appointment, which included the needed immunizations. Without insurance, the sliding scale fees made our care affordable for the family. During the afternoon our Volunteer Chaplain got to know the mom, responded to some parenting problems that were shared, and encouraged her in their mutual Christian faith. This chain of events is living out of what the Apostle Paul wrote about his relationship with the Corinthian church: "And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:7).

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY FROM TRAZANNA

One of our patients shared her thoughts about what Esperanza has meant to her: *"For me, it is like having a second home and a second family."*

What impacts you the most about our patient care?

"Due to the COVID virus pandemic and not having insurance initially, the way that Esperanza's entire team has treated me has been nothing but outstanding—excellent treatment! They are understanding, and I think the thing that really helped me the most is their behavioral health department. I want to tell you something, this treatment has been phenomenal...if I had not had these services through Esperanza, I don't know how I would've made it through. I will say it this way: they always made me feel like I mattered. It didn't make a difference between which doctor, which nurse, which staff...anybody there served me."



How would you describe your experience with us?

"I honestly was embarrassed by having to seek therapy, but there has not been a day that I have been with Esperanza where they have made me feel like that. For me, it is like having a second home and a second family."

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A PERSONAL TESTIMONY FROM TRAZANNA (CONT.)

"Anyone could tell you just how scared I was as I passed through a difficult time this year. Even after some time had passed since a visit and referral, someone from the behavioral health department still contacted me to make sure that I was okay and to see if there was anything they could help me with. I don't know where I would be if the team had not been there."

CHARLES YOUNG, CRNP *Prayer With a Patient, Casting Out Fear*



As the number of COVID-19 cases across the country continues to increase and our clinic ramps up testing for the virus, the community we serve has been enveloped by fear. It is a fear of the unknown, fear of death, and fear of a loss of control. One of my most eye-opening interactions was after testing one of my patients for SARS-CoV-2 earlier this year. She had explained to me how she was afraid her illness would worsen and that her family would be affected. She had asked for prayer. We prayed together, asking that God would not only protect her and her family from the virus but that during this time of distress and darkness, that God would use the situation to bring her family closer to God, depending and trusting in him more than ever before. That visit and that interaction has stayed with me, and has served as a reminder to me that whenever I feel like things are hopeless, that I should first and foremost run towards Jesus.

OUR IMPACT: RESPONDING TO COVID-19

On March 11th, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic, followed by stay-at-home orders in Philadelphia and across the U.S. In response, Esperanza Health Center quickly adjusted to ensure that our patients and community would receive needed care. We provided telehealth patient visits for the first time, implemented COVID-19 testing in Hunting Park and in Kensington, and mobilized to serve our most vulnerable community members through food distribution and other programs. Below are some statistics that highlight the impact we have had in response to the pandemic (through early November 2020):

COVID-19 Tests Performed (patients and non-patients)

Total: 4,187 # of Positive Tests: 743 % Positive: 18%

Total Telehealth Visits Provided

Medical - 11,444 Behavioral Health - 6,946 Dental - 928



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Give the Gift of *Esperanza!*

Your generous gift to Esperanza Health Center will enable us to give *esperanza* to our patients and our community in 2021— as we continue to address the COVID-19 pandemic by providing free testing and health services, and through comprehensive medical, dental, behavioral health, wellness and many other integrated services.

Please consider becoming a "HopeBuilder" monthly donor to make a greater impact year-round! Make a gift today by visiting our website at: esperanzahealth.com/donate. Or, please send a gift by check to: Esperanza Health Center, Attn: Development, 4417 N. 6th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19140-2319. *Thank you!*