



Message of HOPE

A Newsletter of Esperanza Health Center

Spring 2021

In this Spring 2021 edition of *Message of Hope*, we're sharing "Stories of Hope" from several of our staff members, who reflect on some of the ways they have seen God at work in the lives of our patients—and in their own lives—in recent months, as we've continued to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also give an update on our ongoing efforts to provide COVID-19 vaccinations for our patients and community members.

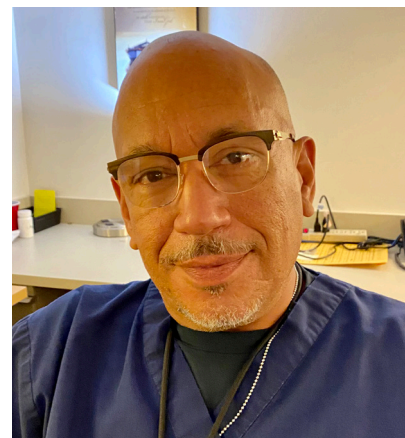
We're grateful for your continued support and partnership, and for your prayers, as we seek to provide high-quality, compassionate care and to bring health, wellness and hope to our North Philadelphia community!



Do You Believe in Miracles? Tomás's Story

by Miguel A. Feria, RN, Care Management Team Nurse

In February of 2020, one of our patients, Tomás* was referred to me for follow-up care by his Esperanza medical care provider. He's an immigrant, a husband and a father of two teens. He was initially referred to me to provide care for unhealed wounds on both of his heels. These wounds were among the multiple traumas Tomás had sustained in an attempted suicide when he jumped off a forty-foot high bridge onto hard ground. In the process, he broke both of his femurs and had to have his gallbladder removed, among other injuries. Tomás survived this attempt against his life. But, God had other plans for his life—and, for mine as well.



Miguel Feria, RN,
Care Management Nurse

As I got to know Tomás, I learned he was a heavy drinker prior to this incident; he now no longer drinks. He painted houses as his trade, and his wife cleans houses. His inability to work placed a significant financial strain on his family. Tomás did not have any health insurance—nor did he have the ability to pay for his needed medications, wound care supplies, specialty consults or transportation. Our Care Management team, medical care team and social work staff were essential in working alongside Tomás to meet these needs as best they could.

It's been a privilege to serve as a member of our Care Management staff since 2017. Our main goal is to support and empower our patients in collaboration with other Esperanza teams and community resources. This can include visits with patients at their home, or at one of our sites. We seek to help patients learn more about their condition, their medications, the importance of monitoring and how to access

[* Note - patient's name has been changed to protect his identity.]

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Do You Believe in Miracles? Tomás's Story *(continued from p. 1)*

resources, and overall to take a more active role in their plan of care.

We began delivering food to Tomás, in addition to all other efforts. Over time, he began looking forward to our meetings. As his heels began to heal, his affect became brighter and he even smiled at some of my bad jokes. We shared stories about our upbringings and life here in the U.S. During some wound care sessions, Tomás would complain of discomfort whenever I pulled stuck dressing from his healing wounds. I would tell him *"No chilles? Acaso ustedes no son puros machos?"* (a colloquial phrase meaning, "Aren't you a true 'macho' man?") in a joking manner, which he found to be funny.

"...his smile and expression of gratitude to God and Esperanza made it an awesome moment that I will always remember, as a testament to God's faithfulness."

Over time, I would stop by his house to drop off donated or purchased food for his household. I have a soft spot for patients that suffer from mental

health issues. As a result, I was always assessing assessing him for depressed mood and suicidal ideation. I shared my phone number with Tomás and encouraged him to call me regardless of day and time if he ever felt unsafe.

Do you believe in miracles? I do. In recent months, I went to see him after a COVID-induced pause on home visits by our Care Management team. The man who had sustained two broken femurs and who had basically no skin on both of his heels is now walking in front of my eyes (praise be to GOD!). Tomás was eagerly waiting to show me what he can now do, while studying my facial expression. Meanwhile, his smile and expression of gratitude to God and Esperanza made it an awesome moment that I will always remember, as a testament to God's faithfulness. It was one of my most memorable days in nursing.

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

- Matthew 25:35-36

Esperanza Health Center Welcomes Haydon Tucker, Family Nurse Practitioner!

Earlier this year, we welcomed the newest member of our primary medical care provider team: **Haydon Tucker, MSN, RN, FNP-C**, family nurse practitioner. Originally from a small mountain town just outside of Chattanooga, TN, she completed her studies at Vanderbilt University where she graduated with a BS in child development and an MSN from the Vanderbilt School of Nursing in 2020. "I was led to healthcare in response to Jesus' call to love our neighbors tangibly and sacrificially, freely giving as we have been freely given. And, I was drawn to Esperanza because of how beautifully this calling is answered by the staff and clinicians in this community." Haydon has enjoyed getting to know her new patients and serving with her Esperanza coworkers over the past few months. In her spare time she enjoys exploring the outdoors, including her new city!



God's Heart for Prevention: EHC's HIV Prevention Care Team

Last fall, Esperanza Health Center established its new HIV Prevention Care team to serve our North Philadelphia communities. We welcomed three new staff to be our HIV Prevention Specialists at each of our three sites, joining **Daniella Pierret** (photo, below), our HIV Prevention Coordinator and **Dominic Derege, DO**, our Associate Medical Director for HIV and Hepatitis C, as the members of our core HIV Prevention team.



Daniella Pierret,
HIV Prevention Coordinator

Esperanza Health Center provides access to Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medications to prevent HIV, and we are seeking to reach our patients and community members who are most at risk for HIV. About 1 in 7 people in the U.S. with HIV are unaware of their HIV status, and Black and Hispanic communities make up 69% of all new HIV diagnoses. We serve anyone interested in HIV prevention, with or without insurance.

Our HIV Prevention Team staff members engage with new and existing patients, seeking to identify those at risk for HIV and to increase the number of our patients who are tested for HIV. They provide prevention education and prescribe and support the use of the new clinically-indicated PrEP medications that are now available to help prevent HIV. They also rapidly link those patients who test positive for HIV to receive HIV medical treatment and care. Our trained Prevention Specialists are eager to respond to patients' questions and concerns, and are readily available to share other avenues of prevention, if desired. All of our health care team members at Esperanza Health Center care deeply about our patients' long-term health and desire to walk alongside them as they pursue wellness in every area of life.

Daniella recently shared some of her reflections on the care that her team seeks to provide for our patients who are at risk for HIV, in Jesus' name: "HIV Prevention, at its core, is a divine representation of God's grace and mercy. We are all so undeserving of it, yet it is lavished on us freely without reproach. In the same way, we at Esperanza have the privilege of providing our communities with long term preventative care as it relates to those at high risk for HIV infection."

"As we continue to press into the needs of our patients we also recognize the neighborhood of Kensington and its need for the gospel of Jesus Christ that is powerful to save. It does not discriminate. It is welcoming to those who seem to be 'too far gone.' My hope is that I can relay this message to the neighborhoods we are based in, while providing tangible efforts for risk reduction. I am humbled to be able to take part in finding the one sheep who left the ninety-nine. They are all so loved and treasured by our gracious Lord."

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Since the start of the year, our **COVID Vaccination Team** has administered **nearly 7,200 vaccines** for thousands of our patients, community members and staff. It has truly been a team effort! In May, we held walk-up vaccine clinics at our Kensington and Fifth Street sites, providing the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. During 2021, we will continue to provide the Moderna vaccine from our sites for patients and community members ages 18 and up. Our Community Ambassadors have been reaching out to North Philadelphia residents to address vaccine misinformation, educate them about the benefits of vaccination, and connect them to vaccine providers.

Walking With and Serving Those Seeking Recovery from Opioid-Use Disorder

by Sarai Melendez, BSW, Community Engagement Specialist

What is it like to work with a vulnerable population that struggles with opioid-use disorder? Two words come to mind: *life changing*. In February 2021, I shadowed our Substance Abuse Counselor as she facilitated one of our weekly medication-assisted treatment (MAT) groups. Our MAT groups provide a safe place where participants can explore their traumas and become educated on how to address them. Groups are scheduled to meet weekly, biweekly or monthly, depending on individuals' stage of rehabilitation. Meanwhile, participants are seen individually by our Intensive Care Manager to develop and evaluate their recovery goals.



Sarai Melendez, BSW, Community Engagement Specialist

Throughout the MAT group session, the patients frequently blamed themselves for losing a loved one's trust. While this type of thinking may sound awful, I realized that this thought was also a sign of progress that our patients were beginning to recognize how their actions impact the ones they love. Additionally, some patients shared that the road they traveled led them closely to death, but were able to recognize that God was the one constant who stood by their side. One patient stated, "God has been my only loyal friend.

God has saved me from dying and has shown me the way." At that moment, I wanted to praise the Lord out loud for being able to extract us from the darkest places we as human beings find ourselves. Having an addiction does not necessitate that one be dependent on a medication, drug or substance. For example, one could be addicted to automatic negative thoughts that lead to depression when left unchecked. Conversely, one could be addicted to grandiose thinking that leads to pride.

One patient stated, "God has been my only loyal friend. God has saved me from dying and has shown me the way."

As I continue to serve our patients who are in recovery, I find myself becoming more mindful of the necessity of balance. I also realize that I am learning from our patients in recovery as they overcome challenges in their lives through daily self-reflection and dependence on God. I thank God for being present in our patients' lives and in my life as well. My prayer is that all of us would awaken to the spiritual battle at hand and the necessity for God's presence in our lives. As Jesus declared in John 10:10, *"the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*