



Message of HOPE

A Newsletter of Esperanza Health Center

SPRING 2023

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A Day of Celebration
With our Community

On a beautiful Saturday in April, over 500 guests from our Kensington community, friends of Esperanza Health Center, staff, volunteers and many others gathered for the **CORE Carnival**, a day of celebration of the opening of our new community wellness center, The CORE. The event included music, food with Philly soft pretzels and a taco truck, games and crafts for kids, raffles with prizes and facility tours. We're thankful for the many volunteers, staff and community members who came together to make this day possible, with special thanks to our community partners for the CORE Carnival: **The Simple Way, Mural Arts Philadelphia, Philly Youth Basketball, and McPherson Square Library**. Individuals who shared remarks during the event's opening ceremony were: Juan Perez, EHC's Chief Operations Officer, who

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Esperanza
Health Center

WELCOME TO OUR TWO NEWEST MEDICAL PROVIDERS!



Nicole Groff, PA-C, MPH joined Esperanza in 2023 as a certified Physician Assistant. A native of Lancaster, PA, she spent many of her formative years in Cambodia and speaks Khmer, Indonesian and Spanish. Nicole received dual masters degrees in Public Health and Medical Science from Emory University, and is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University. She

was inspired by Esperanza's mission of being compelled by the love of Christ to provide holistic healthcare that incorporates each person's social, spiritual, emotional and physical health. Nicole enjoys outdoor activities including biking, running and hiking. Her favorite Bible verse is Ephesians 3:17-19: *"May your roots go down into the soil of God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ though it is too great to understand fully."*

Kaveena Little, PA-C, who joined Esperanza in late 2022 as a certified Physician Assistant, was drawn to work at Esperanza because she wanted to be part of a community of people working together to improve the quality of life of others, with the hope of glorifying God through her work. Originally from Belvidere, NJ, she is a graduate of



Thomas Jefferson University, where she received her Masters of Science in Physician Assistant Studies, and has a Bachelor of Science from Alvernia University. In her spare time, Kaveena likes to read, hike and lift weights and enjoys spending time with friends and family. She is very excited about our new community wellness center, The CORE, which opened earlier this year, and opportunities that we will have at The CORE to provide fitness and wellness programs for our community, staff and patients. Kaveena's favorite passage of scripture is Psalm 23.

THE NEW PROVIDER, AN OLD FRIEND: A PHYSICIAN'S JOURNEY IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALLING

- BY PHILIP SIU, MD

*As we celebrate those who are new to Esperanza, we're thankful to have pediatrician **Philip Siu, MD** with us again on Esperanza's medical team as a part-time pediatric clinician, almost 30 years after he initially served as one of the health center's first physicians. Dr. Siu shares the story of how God has led him throughout his medical career of over 35 years.*

In the fall of 1987, as I was starting the third year of my pediatrics residency at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, my pastor introduced me to Esperanza's founding physician, Dr. Carolyn Klaus. She shared her vision to start Koinonia Health Services, to provide holistic Christian health services in Philadelphia. I was moved by her passion immediately and decided to look for a pediatric position that would allow me one day off weekly so that I could volunteer there.

When Esperanza opened its doors in June of 1989 at our original Fifth Street site, I was their first volunteer physician. Four years later, I told Dr. Klaus my desire to move from my suburban private practice, willing to receive Spanish training in preparation to become a full-time pediatrician with Esperanza.

However, God led me to a different path: in April 1994, just before I was to leave for Spanish language training, a friend told me that the only Chinese-speaking pediatrician in Philadelphia's Chinatown was about to retire and close her practice. I explained that I was planning to work full time for Esperanza, and was not interested in serving the Chinese community. He said to me, "you Christians only know to gather behind closed doors in your church basement to serve one another, but you ignore the needs of your own people in this Chinatown community."

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My heart was wounded by my friend's comment. I had great fear about what would be involved to start a practice in Chinatown, given the financial and administrative burdens—it would have been easier to join an established operation such as Esperanza. And yet, I was not able to forget about my friend's comment. Faced with this dilemma, I sought the advice of Dr. Klaus. She reminded me that when I first met her in 1987, I had expressed my desire to bring this holistic health care model to the Chinese people eventually. She told me that she was not surprised that God was leading me this way. I had totally forgotten about this. She gave me her full blessing to move from serving the Spanish-speaking community to serving Chinese patients.

So, I began to serve patients in Chinatown, while I continued to work part time at Esperanza. In the months that followed, God showed me that He had prepared the way for me to serve the Chinese: within a couple of months, a mission-minded nurse and a receptionist joined our small practice. During the summer of 1994, I joined Dr. Bryan Hollinger, Esperanza's former CMO who had just been hired by Esperanza, for six weeks of intensive Spanish language training in Guatemala. Our two families spent a wonderful time together there.

***"I am very blessed to be the 'new' provider—
but in fact, I am an 'old' friend coming home."***

After I returned, I continued to set up the Chinatown clinic, and we opened Chinatown Pediatric Service (CPS) in early 1995. Over the ensuing nine years, I saw the vast needs of the Chinese people of Philadelphia, far more than just pediatric care—adult health, women's health, the great mental health needs and social services needs. In 2004, we merged CPS with Greater Philadelphia Health Action (GPHA), an existing federally qualified health center with multiple sites in Philadelphia, to form Chinatown Medical Service (CMS) to provide comprehensive healthcare across the age spectrum. God utilized the holistic model of care at Esperanza to teach me to think beyond pediatric care. I served as the medical director of CMS for 14 years after the merger, and CMS still exists today in Chinatown to provide healthcare for adults, women, and children.

As I enter my retirement years, I'm so glad that God opened the door for me to reconnect with Esperanza and to join the staff last December as a part-time pediatrician. I am very blessed to be the “new” provider—but in fact, I am an “old” friend coming home.



EHC VOLUNTEER RECEIVES AWARD FOR SERVICE



We are delighted to announce that one of our volunteers, **Megha Gongalla**, who graduated in May from Temple University, is one of 22 recipients of Temple's **Diamond Awards** for 2023, which are awarded to recognize Temple students who are “passionate about scholarship, devoted to service, and dedicated to leadership.” During her more than two years volunteering at Esperanza, Megha served in our COVID vaccination clinic, assisted our Department of Community Health and Wellness with programming, and pioneered our Teen Summer Internship program for local high school students. While at Temple, she also served as President for the service organization Health Without Boundaries and engaged in epidemiological research in obstetrics and gynecology. Megha will continue her passion for service this August as a medical student at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University. ***Congratulations, Megha!***

BUILDING TRUST, BUILDING FAMILIES

Since Francis Blalock (below, with her youngest son, Zyheem) first brought her oldest son, Zekhi, now age 13, to Esperanza pediatrician Chris Leander, MD in 2009, all three of her children—Zyheem, Zekhi, and six year-old daughter, Zanaya—have had Dr. Leander as their pediatric care provider. As Francis explained, there's a significant level of trust that she and her family have in Dr. Leander, to not only provide excellent medical care but also to offer wise advice and guidance on parenting or other topics. "With Dr. Leander, he pretty much addresses all of my concerns, questions and things that I go through as a parent. I ask Dr. Leander a lot of questions that some parents are afraid to ask. No matter what question I have or what I say, he always manages to help me through it!"

"...I wish there were a thousand Dr. Leanders!"

Dr. Leander reflected on a recent discussion that he'd had with Francis about a difficult area of parenting: "At a recent visit, Francis and I were commiserating on parenting her child with an aggressive temperament. We quickly agreed that it was difficult and certain techniques did not work. Based on prior conversations that I'd had with Francis, I knew it was OK to bring biblical wisdom into the discussion. I told her that as parents, we all instinctively want 'children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right'...but, we often forget the other part of the passage, 'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.' The goal isn't to control our children, but rather to teach them—and none of us does this perfectly! Sometimes we go about it the wrong way and need to apologize to our children, and it's important for them to see that. When I explained this to Francis, she responded, 'Thank you, I needed to hear that.'" Many patients and parents at Esperanza, including Francis, have also testified to how they've been helped by the opportunity to pray with or receive prayer from their care provider. Said Francis: "...[Dr. Leander] prays, and he wishes a blessing on all the kids... you don't get that in other places. I wish there were a thousand Dr. Leanders!"



CORE CARNIVAL - A DAY OF CELEBRATION (CONTINUED FROM P. 1)



served as the Master of Ceremonies; State Senator Christine Tartaglione (PA-2); City Councilmember Quetcy Lozada (District 7); Debra Ortiz-Vasquez, EHC's Director of Community Health and Wellness; Susan Post, EHC's Chief Executive Officer; and, Comfort Bowens and Patrice Rogers, members of our Kensington community who both serve on our CORE Action Team (photo, L and R, with Lianette Pappaterra, MPH, Esperanza's Community Programs Manager, center). Said Susan Post: "It was a very exciting and encouraging day! We are grateful for the Community Health and Wellness Department, the many volunteers and many staff who worked to make this an exciting and successful event."

JOIN US IN OUR MISSION!

There are *many ways you can be involved in Esperanza Health Center's mission* to provide high-quality, comprehensive health care services, in Jesus' name, to the Latino and underserved communities of Philadelphia!

GIVE: Scan the QR code at right, or visit esperanzahealth.com/donate.

SERVE: We're seeking qualified professionals who share in our Christ-centered mission to join our team. To view a list of current openings and to apply, visit esperanzahealth.com/careers. Interested in volunteering? Please visit our website to learn more about our available volunteer opportunities at esperanzahealth.com/join-us/volunteering.

PRAY: Thank you for your prayers for us as we seek to fulfill our mission.

