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Team approach at health centers effective model

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By

To the Editor:

When speaking about value in health care, it is critical to focus on the quality of care delivered to patients as well as how far each dollar goes. Today, many Americans perceive our health care system as being disorganized, confusing and increasingly unaffordable. America's Community Health Center program presents a growing body of evidence that addresses all of these issues by expanding access for more people to a patient-centered primary care medical home.

Studies have shown and continue to show when illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, asthma and depression are not appropriately managed - or prevented in the first place - they account for a significant portion of the skyrocketing costs to families and to the entire health care system. In a primary health care medical home, doctors, nurses, and other providers work closely as a team with patients to prevent - or manage - costly chronic diseases. Community Health Centers, like Syracuse Community Health Center Inc., have been leaders in demonstrating the value of this approach as an effective avenue to help address more needs, improve health and maintain costs.

This unique health center model allows us to save the entire health system, including the government and taxpayers, approximately \$24 billion annually by keeping patients out of more costly health care settings, such as hospital emergency rooms. In these tough economic times, health centers are small businesses that serve as economic engines in their communities. According to the National Association of Community Health Centers, health centers generated \$20 billion in combined economic impact in 2009 and were responsible for nearly 200,000 jobs in areas hit hardest by the recession. In Syracuse, the Syracuse Community Health Center System of Care provides services to more than 80,000 different individuals annually and employs more than 450 individuals in the Central New York community.

Health centers are locally controlled, nonprofit entities directed by patient majority boards of directors, which ensures each health center is accountable and responsive to the community it serves. Nationally, health centers currently provide a health care home to more than 20 million people at 8,000 health care delivery sites nationwide. A long line of presidents and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have long recognized the value of health centers and supported their expansion. National Health Center Week begins Sunday, so there is no better time to celebrate the health centers that power healthier communities. On

behalf of the Syracuse Community Health Center Board of Directors and our entire system of care, thank you for placing your trust in us as your "health care home of choice."

Dr. Ruben P. Cowart is president and CEO of Syracuse Community Health Center, Inc.

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