

Bringing More Medical Expertise, Access to Valley Residents

In an effort to bring the best in access and healthcare to the Central Valley, Community Care Health, a part of Community Health System, is supremely focused on creating a healthier community, which requires far more than just the provision of medical care. Last year, in fact, Community Health System provided \$231 million in uncompensated care, medical education, outreach and patient support services in the Valley – about 12% of the hospital system’s operating expenses. The details on how we create a healthier community for all are published annually in our Community Benefit Report.

In this three-part series, we explore how Community partners with others to help feed the hungry, provide Spanish-speaking diabetes educators, promote the need for COVID-19 vaccinations, support mental healthcare in our community and train healthcare professionals for the Valley.

“I don’t think anyone expects to go into nursing during a pandemic,” intensive care nurse Sukdeep “Deep” Uppal said in October 2021. He’d passed his state boards and joined the ICU team full time at Clovis Community Medical Center just two months before.

Uppal has only known what it’s like to be a nurse while wearing a tightly fit N95 respirator mask, goggles and gloves for an entire shift. He completed his first clinical rotations as a California State University, Fresno, student nurse after the coronavirus pandemic started, and externed at Clovis Community through the end of 2020.

“Especially in the early days of the pandemic, there [were] new precautions and standards that were being updated almost daily,” Uppal said of his hospital training. “It can be a little overwhelming, but the staff here is very welcoming and supportive. They want to make sure you are comfortable and competent. Nursing is a huge learning curve, and I was surprised by that. But it helps a lot to be surrounded by a lot of great people helping you.”

Increasing access to care

In a region with severe shortages of medical professionals, Community Health System is the largest provider of clinical experiences and internships for

nurses, sonographers, physical therapists and respiratory care practitioners.

Last year, Community’s hospitals and clinics trained 2,089 nursing students, like Uppal. Experienced mentor nurses, or preceptors, provided nearly 145,000 hours of supervision and teaching at a cost of \$1.16 million for the hospital system. The funding was part of the health system’s community benefit investment focused on increasing access to care – the top identified health challenge in the region.

Responding to local needs

Community benefit investments are based on a tri-annual Community Health Needs Assessment done jointly among more than a dozen hospitals and health partners in Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties and facilitated by the Hospital Council of Northern & Central California.

Last year’s community benefit efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on training new nurses, investing in attracting top medical specialists, encouraging students in underserved areas to consider healthcare careers and increasing our support for mental health.

Attracting more physicians

The second largest portion of community benefit investment last year – \$43 million – was on medical education to attract physicians to a region that has the lowest doctor-to-patient ratios in California. Community is the training ground for more than 250 medical, dental and pharmacy residents.

Community’s more than 40-year partnership with one of the nation’s

top-rated medical schools, UCSF Fresno, has encouraged physicians to train – and stay – in the Valley. Over the past decade, that commitment has amounted to nearly \$540 million in operating expenses for the residency program.



Opening doors for low-income students

Another important part of last year’s community benefit investment was supporting students from low-income families and disadvantaged neighborhoods to pursue healthcare careers.

Community partnered with State Senator Melissa Hurtado’s Central Valley Dream Scholarship Program to fund scholarships for students of farmworker families. Community also funded scholarships for Central Unified graduates, sponsored College Night for rural schools and equipped Kerman High’s health sciences classes with medical equipment.

For more details on how Community Health System is creating a healthier community for all, please read our Community Benefit Report at <https://www.communitymedical.org/about-us/community-benefit>.