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Providers Collaborating to Streamline Sarasota's Health Care Safety Net For Uninsured and Underinsured

The Patterson Foundation supports collaboration among Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Senior Friendship Centers and Sarasota County Health Department

SARASOTA, Fla. (Jan. 30, 2012) – The Patterson Foundation is funding a consulting team that will develop a plan to preserve and provide for the long-term sustainability of Sarasota County's health care safety net. The foundation offered its support after learning about an existing collaboration among Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Senior Friendship Centers and the Sarasota County Health Department to explore this community issue.

A health care safety net consists of private and public providers that deliver care in a variety of settings to patients who are otherwise unable to afford or access care. The rise of uninsured and underinsured people and the changing health care landscape have created challenges for these main providers and others in Sarasota County, especially increases in uncompensated care and additional costs associated with providing care to these individuals.

"Collaborative partnerships are a powerful way to preserve and improve our community network of care," said Gwen MacKenzie, CEO of Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, which delivers nearly 90 percent of Sarasota County's Medicaid care and more than 60 percent of its self-pay/uninsured care. "As the region's only public and not-for-profit hospital, we deliver a wide range of free specialty and acute hospital care to uninsured and underinsured patients and are committed to working with our community partners to help fill the gaps in the health care continuum in the most cost effective way possible."

While many factors, including health care legislation, will impact the viability of a plan, the partners say the first step is identifying and understanding the needs and makeup of the community.

"The growing number of uninsured individuals along with more people living with chronic diseases compels us to find creative ways to help residents get the health services they need in a timely manner in the most cost-effective way," said Sarasota County Health Department Administrator Chuck Henry. "We know these long-term health conditions can be effectively managed by assuring residents can access affordable, quality primary health care, health promotion and prevention services."

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Senior Friendship Centers, an organization that has been filling gaps in health and dental care for low-income seniors since 1978, relies on many health care professionals who volunteer medical and dental services through its Centers for Healthy Aging.

“Thanks to the generosity of the more than 200 volunteer physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nurses and clinic aides who give time valued at more than \$2 million annually, we have reduced community health care costs as well as the number of patients who would rely solely on tax-payer supported options,” said Bob Carter, president and CEO of the Friendship Centers. “Continued partnerships with the Sarasota County Health Department and Sarasota Memorial Health Care System in a newly defined collaboration supported by The Patterson Foundation will allow us to care for the increasing number of people who are uninsured and in need.”

For The Patterson Foundation, the collaboration presented an opportunity to support a vision that would leverage the expertise of Sarasota County’s main health care providers for the uninsured and underinsured.

“We have the flexibility, opportunity and responsibility to support this collaboration,” said Debra Jacobs, president and CEO of The Patterson Foundation. “What people may not realize is these entities have extremely passionate and engaged leaders who are devoting extra time to help create a plan for a more streamlined health system in our community.”

About The Patterson Foundation

The Patterson Foundation believes that through communications, technology, and financial innovations, improvements may be achieved that transcend any single issue, entity, or geographic area. The Foundation provides resources to facilitate, expedite, and share methods, techniques, and tools, joining with others in creating new realities. . For more information, please visit www.ThePattersonFoundation.org.

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