



July 2017 E-Spotlight

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History Spotlight: Dr. Robert A. Snyder, Erie's Co-Founder



Dr. Robert Snyder and Carmella Jacob

In the 1950s, Dr. Robert A. Snyder, a faculty member at Northwestern University Medical School, and his patient Carmella Genova Jacob, a volunteer at Erie

Neighborhood House, were troubled by the lack of affordable health services in the impoverished West Side community in Chicago. They were particularly concerned about the spread of tuberculosis, as well as the looming polio epidemic.

The two worked to acquire enough medical supplies and volunteers to administer the polio vaccine to hundreds of children. In 1957, the beginnings of Erie Family Health Center was born: first as a volunteer-run, one-room clinic only open one evening a week, then as a designated health center with hospital and agency partnerships to further leverage the impact on patient care.

It's been 60 years, and today Erie Family Health Center has grown to 13 health centers throughout Chicagoland and the northern suburbs, caring for patients in high-need communities. Erie also aims to nurture the next wave of community health care practitioners, and currently provides training for over 300 doctors and other medical professionals.

Though the concept of forming a community health center was new in the 1950s, Dr. Snyder strived to provide equal access to care and medications for all people, not just the ones who could afford it. In residency he worked at the Chicago Municipal

Tuberculosis Sanitarium, and later, he worked at Northwestern University's Student Infirmary, continuing his role there even as he opened his own private practice. He was also Chairman of the Department of Community Health at Northwestern University Medical School, working with others to first create Martin Luther King Health Center, and then later Erie Family Health Center.

"The goal was to provide community services, but to have the community be able to make administrative decisions," said Dr. Snyder's son, Dr. Thomas Snyder, who volunteered with his father in the 1970s while he was a student at Northwestern's School of Medicine. "He wanted the community to have control over the types of services that were being provided."

Dr. Snyder's passion for his work stemmed from a traumatic accident he had as a child. He was riding his bike one day and was hit by a truck and dragged along the road. The results were life altering. He suffered an open skull fracture which left him deaf in one ear and partially paralyzed in his facial nerve. A comminuted fracture required that a steel plate be placed in his leg. His recovery was remarkable, especially considering this happened before antibiotics were discovered. He would always remember the kindness of the doctors who saved his life and restored him back to health.



The Snyder Family

His compassion for others extended outside of the medical exam room as well. Together with wife and family, Dr. Snyder welcomed the homeless under their roof, organized a "meals on wheels" service for those in need of food, and held huge summer picnics in their backyard for anyone and everyone that wanted to come.

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“The way his patients talked about him was so moving,” said Carolyn Snyder-Menke, Dr. Snyder’s youngest daughter. “But he said he was the one who felt like his patients changed his life.”

Dr. Snyder passed away in 1986 at the age of 69, but his legacy is followed by his six sons and daughters, two of whom are doctors, one a nurse specialist, and three who use their gifts to provide healing through music, yoga, and improving our environment.

“He told me, ‘You never do something to be thanked,’” said Snyder-Menke. “You do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

As we look to the next sixty years of providing care we remember Dr.

Snyder and his patient Carmella Jacob, whose vision and compassion will benefit the lives of our neighbors for future generations to come.



Health Center Spotlight: Teen Center’s New Home



Over 30 years ago, the Erie Teen Center started out as a small storefront in the West Town neighborhood of Chicago. At the time, the idea that adolescents required a different model of

care than adults or children was just emerging. But Erie has always recognized the unique health care needs of teens, a population that especially benefits from compassionate understanding and care – in the medical exam room, and outside of it.

Since then, the center has grown to serve approximately 2,400 teens a year and gone through multiple incarnations, relocating from North Center, Chicago to Erie Foster Avenue Health Center after a fire in May 2014, and then traveling across the city in November 2015 to settle into its permanent home, sharing a building with Erie Division Street Health Center.

The move to the Humboldt Park community is strategic. Forty-three percent (43%) of Humboldt Park residents are children or young adults under the age of 24, and many experience early exposure to stress and trauma resulting from violence, physical or sexual abuse, family instability, or poverty. The Teen Center’s staff are trained and experienced in offering a variety of health services in a safe, confidential environment, including testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, prenatal care, family planning, fitness and nutrition counseling, and behavioral health counseling. Our staff know that they’re not just providing care, but that they’re also helping teens grow into responsible, engaged adults. And for many teens, their encounter with the doctors and clinical staff at Erie Teen Center represents critical support and guidance they can’t find anywhere else.

But to meet the ever-growing need for young adult guidance and care, the Teen Center’s new location on Division and Western would require additional renovation and construction – new exam rooms, staff offices, and a makeover of the waiting area. This vision became a reality thanks to generous funding and support from The Pritzker Traubert Family Foundation, Illinois Children’s Healthcare Foundation, Tom Russell Charitable Foundation, Inc., and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), as well as the partnership of the Chicago Department of Public Health. The project also benefited from a New Market Tax Credit investment from PNC and the Chicago Community Loan Fund. In May 2017 the Teen Center staff welcomed patients to a newly

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expanded, sparkling facility. The Teen Center now boasts a total of 10 (expanded from six) exam rooms, an integrated behavioral health suite, a beautiful waiting area with multiple check-in stations, a centralized care station, and ample staff workspace. When at capacity, the Teen Center will serve 4,000 to 5,000 patients in the newly developed space, approximately double the number of patients being seen now.

On Tuesday, June 20, Erie held ribbon-cutting festivities in celebration of the Teen Center's new home. At the day's events, Erie honored key funders, elected officials and the Chicago Department of Public Health for collaborating to make the renovation possible. Also present were numerous hospital, agency, school, and community organizations whose partnership with Erie has made and will continue to make services for our teens more accessible and integrated.

"The Teen Center can be a lifeline for the thousands of patients we serve both in Humboldt Park and across the city," said Robin Varnado, Erie's Regional Director of Operations and Behavioral Health. "We're delighted and grateful to be able to serve an additional 2,000 patients in our expanded location."

Health Promotions Spotlight: Free Yoga at Erie Evanston/Skokie Health Center



Every Monday at 6 p.m. adults from ages 30 to 70 years made themselves comfortable on mats in an empty

conference room at Erie Evanston/Skokie Health Center to learn basic poses and breathing from pediatrician Dr. Aimee Crow. Some had physical issues with their joints, others were trying to manage their weight. One woman

was struggling with grief, another had recurring migraines. But all of them felt that the practice helped alleviate their stress – indeed, at the end of the six weeks, every one of the program's participants wished for the classes to continue.

Dr. Crow spearheaded this six-week pilot yoga program at Erie Evanston/Skokie Health Center to help inform patients of the benefits of yoga and give them the opportunity to practice it with her guidance. Flyers were posted advertising the free class, and doctors referred their patients into it.

"Having a daily mindfulness practice may matter as much as any medicine we prescribe," said Dr. Crow. "Anyone can do yoga, it can be modified to any ability or body type. Anyone can do the breathing, the meditative aspect."

Dr. Crow first became interested in health care after college while working as an outreach worker with homeless teens. She went on to graduate from Harvard Medical School and completed her residency in pediatrics at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago. "Because of its focus on prevention, pediatric medicine is very hopeful," she said. "There's a lot of room for making a difference."

Dr. Crow started practicing yoga in her twenties to manage the stress of medical school. The practice has helped Dr. Crow and millions of others around the world with strength, flexibility, balance, and mindfulness, which can translate into reduction of disease. But Dr. Crow, a hospitalist and outpatient pediatrician who sees patients at Erie Evanston/Skokie, NorthShore University HealthSystem Evanston Hospital, and Evanston Township High School, became certified to teach yoga five years ago because she was troubled by how limited access to yoga was for those with little income. "Finally," said Dr. Crow, "at Erie, I got my chance to make a dream of mine a reality."

Dr. Crow remembers one patient during the class, a woman who told her she had lost touch with her body over the years as she started working and raising children. But that changed after just six weeks of yoga classes. "She became yoga's greatest fan. Every week she said she felt so alive and good, and was so happy to be taking care of herself."

But the program will need further funding to continue. The health center is in need of supplies – yoga blocks, straps, blankets, and mats. Dr. Crow's vision is to grow the program so that patients at other Erie sites can participate, and to hire another teacher. "Yoga

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has had a very positive impact on this group of Erie patients' health. It's a program worth investing in."

If you are interested in giving to this cause, please contact Development Specialist Genevieve Salazar at gsalazar@eriefamilyhealth.org.

Provider Spotlight: Dr. Ashok Nagella

Depression, anxiety, and situational or chronic stress can all



affect physical health – and one's physical health can also have an impact on mood and emotional well-being. No one believes this more than Dr. Ashok Nagella, a psychiatrist

who joined Erie Family Health Center in July 2016. Dr. Nagella firmly believes that a patient's physical and mental well-being are inextricably linked, and encourages his patients to adopt a diet of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains to support them in their treatment.

Dr. Nagella wasn't always a big believer in nutrition. In 2006, just six months after he completed the Milwaukee marathon, he was diagnosed with diabetes. "I was shocked at the diagnosis," he said. He was a runner and exercised regularly, but he relied on quick, processed carbs and sugary drinks for his source of energy. He was placed on several medications for cholesterol and diabetes and, eager to get off of them and change his lifestyle, he dove into research on healthy eating and found evidence that a plant-based diet could not only potentially reverse the effects of common chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease, but that eating more fruits and vegetables support cognitive functioning as well.

Today, Dr. Nagella stays away from fruit juices, soda, processed meats, and dairy. He also meditates at least twenty minutes a day to help with stress management. The results? He only has to take one daily medication for diabetes, his blood sugar levels have reduced significantly, and he has more energy than ever before.

Dr. Nagella uses what he has learned about diet and exercise to guide his patients through their treatment. He doesn't just ask his patients questions about their mood or stress levels – he also asks them how they sleep, how often they get in physical activity, what they eat in a typical day, and how much caffeine they consume. All these factors can have a huge impact on how someone feels, their relationship with others and the world around them, as well as their immediate response to stress.

"Anything that I prescribe will only be beneficial if someone is making positive lifestyle changes," he said. "When kids come in with attention deficit issues and they've got a phone or a tablet in their hand or they're watching a lot of TV, they're not going to be able to focus much better, even with the proper medication. They need to reduce their screen time first."

One mother saw dramatic changes in her son, who frequently threw temper tantrums. She brought him in to see Dr. Nagella, who suggested, among other calming techniques, that she begin to incorporate more green, leafy vegetables and fruit in his diet. Her son has a spinach smoothie made with almond milk every day – and she has noticed that his tantrums are much more few and far between, he sleeps soundly at night, and he gets along much better with others.

Dr. Nagella also has altruistic reasons for encouraging his patients to adhere to a plant-based lifestyle. It has been estimated that low-meat diets could substantially ward off deforestation and reduce the costs of climate change mitigation as much as 50 percent by the year 2050. Preserving our world for generations to come is an additional motivator for Dr. Nagella, who believes that goodwill is a natural defense mechanism against depression and anxiety.

"Anything that's good for the heart is good for the brain," said Dr. Nagella. "I'm glad when people are finding so much benefit to the changes they are making that they feel that don't need to see me as much – or at all!"

For further information on the positive effects of a plant-based diet, please visit:

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PCRM.org
NutritionFacts.org

Dr. Nagella also recommends the following documentaries:

Forks Over Knives
Vegucated
Cowspiracy
Food, Inc.

Your contribution ensures that Erie's services will remain accessible and affordable for anyone who needs them. Thank you for giving our patients hope for a healthier future.

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If you have a question about donating to Erie or the programs your support helps make possible, please contact Kate Birdwell at 312.432.7440 or e-mail her at kbirdwell@eriefamilyhealth.org.