In 1957, a clinic opened in the kitchen of Erie Neighborhood House on Chicago’s West Side. A volunteer staff provided care for community residents two afternoons a week. This was the very beginning of Erie Family Health Center: a collaboration between co-founders Carmella Jacob and her physician Dr. Robert Snyder to make health care accessible and affordable to everyone.

By the 1970’s, Erie had an annual budget of $38,000, and additional staff to provide specialized care for women and children were brought on board to address community need. At that time, a chance encounter between Dr. Roger Meyer, a pediatrician aiding the new clinic, and Dr. Ann Doege resulted in Dr. Doege’s coming to the clinic as a part-time pediatrician.

Dr. Doege attended medical school at the University of Rochester in New York, where she met her husband, Dr. Theodore Doege, an internist. Ann completed her residency in pediatrics at the University of Washington in Seattle. After school, together the couple traveled to northern Thailand to help develop a new medical school and stayed there for three years, teaching and assisting with the training of doctors and nurses at Chiang Mai’s Faculty of Medicine.

Once they returned to the states, it was difficult for their children to adjust to American life. Dr. Doege stayed at home with them – but not for long. “When we returned to the Chicago area in 1970, our two children were old enough that the idea of helping take care of children on the West Side appealed to me.”

In those early days, Dr. Doege was witness to much of the groundwork needed to make Erie’s impact grow. She worked alongside Mary Burns, one of Erie’s founders and a Board Member. Burns was a community organizer and volunteer, just as passionate about expanding Erie’s services as she was about spreading the word about them. She brought in numerous grants, partnerships, and in-kind donations for Erie, organized large-scale events, and held classes and activities for senior citizens in the community. Ms. Burns retired after 50 years of service, at 86 years of age. Many called her “Mother Burns.” Mary Burns passed away in 2011, but she is remembered and missed by many at Erie.

“My first time at Erie, I was taken on a tour of the facility,” recalled Dr. Doege. “Mary Burns was closing the center for the day told me she would be back the first thing in the morning to mop the floors!”

Dr. Doege was also friends with Sally Lundeen, a nurse serving as a graduate faculty member of UIC and working on her PhD. Dr. Lundeen became Executive Director of Erie Family Health Center, and wrote the first government grant to increase Erie’s funding. “She was just our Mother Erie,” said Dr. Doege. “She is a remarkable person!”

Dr. Lundeen joined the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee faculty in 1985, and was appointed Dean of the College of Nursing in 2001, where she continued to encourage the use of nurse practitioners. She retired in 2016.

Dr. Doege herself served as medical director, managing the increased patient growth – and the ever increasing need for more exam rooms. “We were very short of space,” she said. “The first time I saw the space at Erie street, it was so dusty!
January 2017 E-Spotlight

There was sawdust and machinery everywhere.” With the help of an architect, that dusty space became Erie West Town Health Center, which eventually moved to Chicago and Paulina. Just over 10 years later, the site expanded again to Superior and Paulina, serving 15,300 patients in 2016.

Dr. Doege and her husband have since retired and moved to Hinsdale, but she says she will always remember her time with Erie. They continue to donate to Erie in memory of their dear friend Mary Burns.

Erie is so grateful to founding members like Dr. Ann Doege, Dr. Sally Lundeen, and Mary Burns, who together increased health care access in Chicago. Throughout our 60th anniversary year, we will honor their hard work and commitment by continuing to build Erie Family Health Center into a positive force of change and health justice.

Do you have stories of Erie Family Health Center that you would like to see published in our 60th anniversary year? Email celebrate60@eriefamilyhealth.org with your memories!

Provider Spotlight: Leyna Inberg, MSN

Leyna Inberg, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner at Erie Family Health Center, was first inspired to delve further into the field of mental health care after taking a psychology class in high school. After college she began her career as a case manager – but while she enjoyed her work, she felt limited in her ability to assist patients. Inberg desired a more central role in the care of her patients, many of whom faced complex conditions with too few resources and not enough support from their mental health providers.
She went on to receive her Masters of Science in Nursing from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and today she specializes in psychiatry and addiction at Erie.

Inberg has become one of Erie’s leading voices on the opioid epidemic that has overtaken the country. Drug overdose is the primary cause of accidental death in the United States. In 2015 alone, over 20,000 people overdosed and died after taking prescription pain relievers. In fact, on an average day in the United States, 650,000 opioid prescriptions are dispensed – and 78 people die from opioid-related overdose. As a response to this epidemic, Inberg has been teaching other Erie clinicians about non-addictive medications they can prescribe to help decrease patient pain, as well as suggesting tapers for those patients who are currently taking opioids.

Inberg is also making her voice heard in our community. She represented Erie’s behavioral health team as a panelist at the Substance Abuse Town Hall hosted by Erie Humboldt Park Health Center in August 2016, where she discussed strategies for confronting the opioid epidemic on our own streets with Chicago political and health care leaders, including Alderman Roberto Maldonado, Healthcare Alternative Systems CEO Marco Jacome, Rincon Family Services CEO Eddy Borrayo, and the Shriver Center’s Assistant Director of Health Care Justice Stephanie Altman.

In addition, to ensure that Erie’s patients are receiving the counsel and guidance they need to manage chronic pain without relying on opioids, Inberg has started a support group at Erie Foster and Erie Division Street Health Centers. Any Erie patient can join the support group, which runs for eight weeks. Patients in this group suffer from pain caused by car accidents, fibromyalgia, and even nerve damage resulting from diabetes. During the eight weeks, Inberg teaches them coping strategies for managing their anxiety, depression, and pain. The group is now in its third cycle – and patients have found it so helpful, they’ve asked to return.

“Psychiatric exams are critical,” says Inberg. “They should really be looked at like a physical exam: available, affordable, and just one more measure of someone’s health.”
Unfortunately, the stigma surrounding mental health is global – but runs especially deep in Latino communities. Inberg says that Latino males in particular are discouraged from seeking psychiatric care by their families, and instead told to ‘man up.’ “There’s this idea that if you are mentally ill you are out of control or violent. So Latinos don’t receive the familial support they need, which is so important to getting better.”

Still, Inberg is combating stigma one patient at a time. She tells the story of one patient who came to Erie after he wasn’t receiving adequate psychiatric care – his psychiatrist would only see him once every six months. He was deeply troubled, and often saw sinister images and heard voices. When he first started receiving care from Inberg, he was guarded and suspicious, and the voices were telling him to hurt her. “But we worked hard together,” said Inberg. “He’s starting to feel better, and feel hopeful – and even though he still hears voices, he and I have built a trusting, collaborative relationship.”

Erie is truly grateful to have Inberg as an advocate for our patients and a leader for our community in substance abuse prevention. Her passion for educating her colleagues is essential for enacting lasting change in how both patients and doctors understand opioids and mental health. We are excited to see what else Inberg does for community health in 2017!

Funder Spotlight: Erie Receives $25,000 CVS Health Community Grant

Chronic diseases were among six of the top 10 causes of death in 2014, and heart disease and cancer together accounted for 46% of the total. These percentages are even higher in the low-income, minority communities Erie serves.

In order to reduce these disparities and improve quality of life, Erie Family Health Center has expanded its chronic disease management program to impact the lives of over 8,500 patients struggling with diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses.

CVS Health created the Community Grants Program as part of its commitment to building healthier communities. These grants support nonprofit organizations that are providing much-needed access to health care for at-risk and underserved populations. The support from CVS Health will help Erie fund a critical program to support patients struggling with chronic disease.

Erie’s program connects youth and adults not only to health care resources, but also to social services. Patients facing the challenges of chronic illnesses such as diabetes or heart disease may also be struggling with transportation issues or lack of access to a secure job. They may even be homeless. By linking patients to valuable social services as part of their overall health care program, Erie’s care managers and care coordinators are setting patients on the path to healthier, more fulfilling lives including better prospects for finding steady work and family stability.

“We are so pleased to partner with CVS Health to help engage more patients in preventive care and necessary screenings while reducing barriers such as transportation or housing concerns,” said Erie’s Community Programs Manager, Shira Dunn, who oversees the program. “It is very difficult for patients who are facing multiple health challenges along with social crises to navigate the complicated health care system without the support that our care managers and care coordinators provide.”

“As a pharmacy innovation company, we are committed to helping people on their path to better health. We are proud to support organizations that increase access to quality health care because we know their efforts are critical to delivering better community health,” said Eileen Howard Boone, Senior Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropy, CVS Health. “We are pleased to support the work that Erie Family Health Center does in the community and we look forward to working with them to fulfill their program’s mission.”

Erie was selected to receive a grant through the CVS Health Community Grants 2016 application process. Grants were
“Erie Family Health Center is grateful for this partnership with CVS and proud to be a CVS Health Community Grants Award-ee. Because of this grant, more people will feel better and become engaged participants who contribute to the wellbeing of our entire community,” added Dunn.

Eriedescence 2017: Buy Your Tickets Today!

Enjoy an evening of dancing, drinks, a silent auction – and more! Join Erie Family Health Center’s Auxiliary Council in raising funds for Erie’s health education programs on Friday, March 10 at Chez.

Erie patients are able to access a variety of services that go beyond basic primary care. These health and wellness programs help every member of the family stay healthy and active from infancy through adulthood, and enable patients to take control of and manage their own health, decreasing their reliance on frequent, expensive and often emergency care.

Purchase your tickets for Eriedescence 2017 here

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.

Donate Now!

If you have a question about donating to Erie or the programs your support helps make possible, please contact Genevieve Salazar at 312.432.7378 or e-mail her at gsalazar@eriefamilyhealth.org.