Provider Spotlight: Dr. Caroline Hoke

Dr. Caroline Hoke, Erie’s Chief Clinical Officer, has dedicated her distinguished career to providing high quality care for the medically underserved, improving health outcomes through innovative clinical leadership, and to growing the community health workforce by recruiting and training skilled providers.

Dr. Hoke joined Erie Family Health Centers in 2004 and has served as a dedicated member of Erie’s women’s health team for 14 years. She was promoted to the position of Hospira Foundation Endowed Medical Director for Women’s Health in 2014, and in 2017 Erie turned to her to take over the role of Interim Chief Clinical Officer (CCO).

Dr. Hoke’s commitment to improving health access was born of an early, unique perspective. Growing up in a military family, she always had access to healthcare that was very egalitarian. Privates got the same level of care as the generals. But as her family moved from base to base, she was surprised by the disparity of the health systems she saw overseas – as well as in the “civilian” world back in the United States.

“I remember being shocked by the idea of where and to whom you were born could affect access to basic services I always thought were rights for everyone,” she says. She was particularly influenced during her college years by jobs working in a restaurant kitchen alongside a group of men who were formerly incarcerated, and serving as a caregiver to a roommate, a fellow student painstakingly working her way through school despite being non-verbal and quadriplegic. These early experiences culminated with caring for a largely uninsured and disenfranchised population in medical school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Skilled at building partnerships, Dr. Hoke has expanded Erie’s involvement in the delivery program at partner hospitals, and directs Erie’s work to train OB/GYN residents. Under her leadership, Erie delivered over 2,500 babies in fiscal year 2018 (a 45% increase over the past five years). This is more deliveries than any other community health center in Illinois, and more than 99% of health centers nationally. Dr. Hoke embedded a “just say yes” philosophy into Erie’s delivery team: no pregnant woman should ever be denied care, despite whatever complications she might be presenting or how late she is entering prenatal care. Erie is embracing these patients when other practices in our area weren’t doing so before.

Dr. Hoke even lives Erie’s mission to provide healthcare for all in her free time. Since 2010, she has traveled annually to Bolivia to provide surgical services and train the local hospital’s residents and attendings.

Dr. Hoke expertly balances long, sleepless nights in the delivery room, unpredictable OB on-call schedules, and the administrative responsibilities of leading Erie’s comprehensive medical services. She often comes to evening Board of Directors meetings straight from the hospital, or leaves at meeting’s end to go back to deliver babies after making a quick transition into her hospital scrubs. She is amazingly energetic, upbeat and tireless in her commitment to advance care for our patients.

When asked what motivates her, she doesn’t hesitate: “I
believe that a person’s lack of resources should not limit their access to the highest quality healthcare.” She adds, “I can’t stomach the injustice of opportunity being so inequitably distributed starting from the time we are just fetuses ourselves (due to the effects of stress and social determinants of health that affect intrauterine life). I abhor the idea that being born on a side of an arbitrary border, or into one neighborhood or another, or with skin that is more pigmented or not, determines health, access to education, safe areas to reside in and the possibilities one has in life. “

Dr. Hoke has enormous heart for our patients and the work that Erie does. We are proud to have her on our team, and as one of Erie’s leaders.

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.

Alumni Spotlight: Dr. Javier Flores

Dr. Javier Flores’ belief in the life-changing impact of Erie Family Health Centers’ work is rooted in his own experience as an Erie patient and former provider. The road towards becoming a doctor wasn’t easy for Javier, who immigrated to the United States with his mother, grandparents, and little sisters when he was seventeen years old.

“When we came here, we didn’t have anything – no food, no place to live, no money,” said Javier. Shortly after their arrival, Javier’s grandfather fell ill and ended up in the hospital. While it was a time of uncertainty and struggle, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Javier’s grandfather was referred to Erie for follow-up care, and soon the entire family was receiving their health care at Erie, too.

“We didn’t speak English, didn’t know anything about insurance,” said Javier. “The social workers at Erie set up so many programs for my grandparents and my mom.” Javier was inspired by the quality of care he and his family were getting, which included school physicals, vaccinations, nutrition support for his mother, and even mental health support for his grandparents.

Healthcare hadn’t always been so readily available for Javier and his family. When he was ten, Javier’s father passed away from untreated gallstones. At the time, the family lived in a rural area of Mexico without access to good healthcare. They traveled to the nearest big city to seek help, but by then it was already too late. The memory of his father’s passing, which could have been prevented with the help of a doctor if one had been available in his village, stuck with Javier. “I felt useless, like I
couldn’t do anything to help. I never wanted to feel like that again.”

But it was ultimately his mother who inspired him to seek a career in medicine. Evert Flores was a single mother who wanted nothing more than to see all three of her children excel. Dr. Lee Francis, Erie’s President and CEO, cared for Evert for many years until her passing four years ago, and remembers her fondly. “She was always so proud and encouraging to her family.”

Javier pursued higher education and eventually, a medical degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Language and money were both huge barriers for him. He worked full time during his undergraduate degree as an audio-visual technician and put himself through medical school by tutoring his classmates. He studied longer and harder than his peers just to understand the curriculum and material that was not presented in his native language.

Javier became the first physician in his family. After he completed medical school and his residency, he worked at Erie for a year and then moved on to open his own office and practice, Grand Vein Specialists, which now has three offices across the Chicagoland area. Dr. Flores is board certified in family medicine and venous medicine. And just like his mother Evert wished, his two sisters also have successful careers – one as a nurse and another as a teacher.