



Improving health. Improving lives.

## Q&A With Neftali Serrano

Neftali Serrano leads the behavioral health team at Access Community Health Centers, serving both as an excellent healthcare provider and an administrator with a passion for developing innovative, effective programs.



### **Q. How can addressing a patient's mental health concerns affect his or her physical health?**

The key to managing many medical conditions, particularly chronic illnesses such as diabetes, rests in a person's ability to make behavior changes, start new life routines, focus on self-care, and generally to devote the mental energy necessary to take control of their health. Most of us take this for granted. However when faced with life stresses, relationship problems, or brain conditions such as bipolar disorder, our ability to make these kinds of changes is severely compromised. At Access, we provide targeted, in-exam room support in these areas so that patients have what it takes to manage their health effectively.

### **Q. What are the benefits to the patient of a joint physical/behavioral health visit?**

Access patients benefit from the fact that we treat both their physical and emotional health at the same time. This ensures they get the help at the moment they need it most, and reduces the problems inherent with making another appointment and maneuvering a different health system. Integrating behavioral and physical health care appointments is therefore both highly effective, and very convenient for patients.

### **Q. Describe how a patient is identified as potentially benefiting from a behavioral intervention**

Typically a patient's primary care physician will identify individuals who may potentially benefit from a behavioral health consultation. For example, this could be someone who would like to quit smoking, or someone who may be showing symptoms of depression. The physician introduces the idea to the patient and, when appropriate, will then invite the behavioral health consultant into the exam room. After a brief visit the consultant will make recommendations to the physician and together with the patient they will determine follow-up.

### **Q. How can we measure the impact of having behavioral healthcare included in our services?**

We measure impact in a variety of ways. We track the productivity of our Behavioral Healthcare Consultants (who average over 10 visits per day) as well as accessibility (we see patients on average about 2-3 times in a given year). We want to make sure we are always accessible to the patients who need us most. We also track our patients' well-being using surveys which help us monitor how well our patients with depression are doing. Through use of our electronic medical records system, we can identify which patients continue to struggle and can make sure we are doing everything possible to support them.

## Our Model of Care

A critical aspect of the care we offer at Access Community Health Centers is to take into account all the circumstances of life which can affect health. So in addition to the medical and dental services that we provide, we are also able to direct patients to key resources that they may need. In some cases this may come in the form of assistance with applying for BadgerCare, or housing or community services. It may also mean that we address mental health issues such as depression, which can greatly impact a patient's ability to get and stay well.

As a result, Access has been at the forefront of a movement among non-profit community health centers to implement a model of care that includes behavioral health intervention. We believe that this innovative approach gives our health care providers a much needed tool. It also positively impacts our patients' health, while also holding the potential for reducing costs by ensuring that individuals are getting the right kind of care, in the right setting, and at the time it's most needed.

*Sincerely,*

*Ken Loving, MD  
CEO, Access Community Health Centers*

## Celebration of Service

Each Spring, Access holds a Celebration of Service dinner to recognize all of the different elements that go into providing the best possible healthcare for the vulnerable people in our community who need it most. Our 2011 dinner, attended by nearly 700 people throughout the community, offered thanks to our staff, supporters and partners, and also highlighted the approach we will be taking in the in year ahead. In particular our focus will be on ensuring that Access continues to take a comprehensive look at all the factors affecting our patients. We know, for example, that involving all of our care providers as a team helps create a path to health for a patient that might not happen if each of that person's visits were treated as separate and unrelated. The dinner featured a video presentation that demonstrated how a critically-needed medical intervention was enabled by the relationship of trust and understanding that developed between a provider and a family receiving care at Access.

## Adolescent Health Education Project

This year, Access is partnering with three community organizations to provide health education to middle school youth, helping them to create a strong foundation for healthy lifestyles and behavior. Dr. Armando Hernandez and Dr. Mollie Kane are delivering health education messages to youth through programs at Lussier Community Education Center, East Madison Community Center, and Centro Hispano. The focus of the project is to provide middle school adolescents with information about health related topics --issues that they are struggling and dealing with on a daily basis, as well as issues that they are going to have the most misinformation about related to physical and behavioral health. The project also provides young people with information about how to obtain health and behavioral health services at an Access clinic. These health education sessions have been extremely well received by participants, who have been highly engaged and responsive. Funding for the Adolescent Health Education Project is provided by the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation.

## Family Fitness Program

In 2009, Access received grant funding from the BerbeeWalsh Foundation to pilot a new program at our South Side Clinic whose aim is to offer patients increased options for maintaining their good health. The Family Fitness Program provides families with comprehensive fitness and nutrition services through a partnership with the YMCA of Dane County, Inc. The YMCA gives Family Fitness participants the opportunity to utilize exercise facilities, classes, and programs at all three of its three Dane County locations. For



its part, Access provides families with nutrition education, case management and outreach, transportation assistance, and incentives for reaching self-management goals. This year, we have received additional grant funding from the Cremer Foundation to expand the program to families at our William T. Evjue Clinic, and to implement some program enhancements. We are currently working with 22 families at the WTE Clinic and 17 families at our South Side Clinic. Access' program coordinator is, Susan Swenson, a Registered Dietitian. She works closely with the Behavioral Health team, as well as our Americorp member, Maggie Gritt, who is a part of our Community Resource Specialist staff. All families are required to attend four group classes that will begin this summer. Classes will provide families with nutrition education, a family fitness activity, and a healthy snack. An intern from the University of WI College of Agricultural & Life Sciences Dietetics Department will soon begin working at Access to assist with the program.

It is our belief that, over the long-term, Family Fitness has the capability to create a healthier community by giving families information, incentives and opportunities to become more active. The Family Fitness program, by providing education on nutrition and fitness, as well as a support system, helps entire families to establish healthy habits that will last a lifetime.