April was a momentous month for EMH Kids Care Express, a pediatric after-hours visit program staffed by nurse practitioners in Elyria, Ohio. Part of the EMH Regional Healthcare System, Kids Care Express saw its 1,000th patient in April—and the program had been open only about 3 months!

One of those patients was a 9-year-old boy with symptoms of influenza. Sally Fenik, MSN, CRNP, the nurse practitioner on duty when the child came in, was concerned that he might have the so-called swine flu that was suddenly in the news. Thanks to her careful diagnostic approach and prompt treatment, the local count of swine flu cases 6 weeks later remained at just this one case.

The swine flu tale is perhaps the more intriguing part of this story. But for nurse practitioners, it’s equally important to know that the care the patient received in an NP-staffed after-hours visit program is responsible for his speedy recovery and the local containment of the illness. Here is proof positive that NPs are capable of detecting and managing illnesses and enhancing the health of the community.

A Clinic Is Born
Elyria is located about 25 minutes west of Cleveland in Lorain County. An urban district with a wide range of socioeconomic levels, Elyria is home to many people who do not have their own private health care providers. Often, they rely on EMH’s emergency department when they need medical care.

To meet the health care needs of the area’s young population and to accommodate parents who cannot take their children to a pediatrician during working hours, EMH’s vice president of patient care and chief nursing officer, Debi Jones, RN, MS, NEA-BC, FACHE, came up with the idea for an after-hours visit program for children. Pediatric nurse practitioners would staff the program.

Initially, some skeptics were lukewarm to the plan. They questioned whether nurse practitioners could handle the complex cases that might walk through the doors of an after-hours pediatric visit program. But nurse practitioners were enthusiastic. “I wanted to be part of this pioneering venture,” says Sally Fenik. Sally was the second nurse practitioner hired for the program. In November 2008, she and 4 other NPs began to set up Kids Care Express. On January 12, 2009, EMH Kids Care Express officially opened its doors for business.

Operating hours for Kids Care Express are 4:00 PM until 11:00 PM, 7 days a week.
Practitioner Roundtable includes the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, the American College of Nurse Practitioners, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties.

The briefing, called The Primary Care Role of Nurse Practitioners, couldn’t have been more timely. Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) had just introduced her health reform bill, which supports NPs as primary care providers. Rep. Schwartz co-hosted the forum, along with Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA) and Rep. Steve LaTourette (R-OH). Staff of these members of Congress were well represented at the briefing, and members of the NP community (myself included) were also in attendance.

The NP panel accomplished something critically important. The 4 panelists told compelling stories illustrating the variety of NP practice across the country and highlighted some barriers that limit patient access and quality and contribute to rising health care costs.

The Presentations

Thad Wilson, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, associate dean at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, was the first speaker and moderator of the briefing panel. He reviewed the alphabet soup that bewilders many on the Hill and provided context and definitions for NP vs RN vs LPN. Then he discussed the looming shortage of primary care physicians and linked the primary care NP workforce to health care homes of the future. He pointed out that when states try to achieve universal access, such as Massachusetts has done, they must have a ready workforce in place—and NPs are well positioned to step in. Describing a patient he knows, he talked about how NPs’ inability to admit to home health care sets up access barriers for patients. This barrier requires a federal fix.

Mona Counts, PhD, CRNP, FNP, FAANP, a nurse practitioner entrepreneur in Appalachia, captivated everyone’s attention when she described how she serves patients in rural, mountainous West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Her practice provides primary care for over 6,000 rural residents, and it meets all guidelines of the National Committee for Quality Assurance. The community sought her out for health care, and her mobile practice took off because of the dire need. She passionately described the harrowing barriers that her community faces day in and day out and spoke of the need to move away from a “finger-in-the-dike” system to a system that actually cares for patients.

Marilou Shreve-Doffin, MSN, APN, CPNP, a pediatric nurse practitioner from rural Arkansas, described the 2-tiered system of health care in that state. She explained how federal policies can have an unintended perverse impact on patients. For example, Arkansas has a federal CMS waiver that exempts NPs from serving as primary care providers—even though there are 10,000 children without health insurance! Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas pays NPs only for level 2 or 3 services, arbitrarily limiting the range of care they can provide, and reimburses NPs 75% as much as physicians for the same services. In addition, some insurance policies in Arkansas require consumers to pay higher co-pays when they see NPs. Listeners at the congressional briefing were left with a sense of outrage after hearing these stories.

Who Inspires You?

Deadline for Submissions is August 28th!

Do you know an NP whose achievements caring for women inspires others? Think of the person you work with or know of who makes you want to do your best. Maybe you know of someone whose example in clinical practice, research, or teaching helped you or others to be that much better. Pay tribute to this person by nominating her or him for the 2009 NPWH Inspirations in Women’s Health Award.

There will be three winners; awards will be presented on October 15, 2009, at NPWH’s Clinical Conference in Providence, Rhode Island. Transportation (within the United States), hotel, and meeting costs will be provided, and a scholarship will be awarded, to three individuals who inspire us all.

For more information about the contest, send an email to Aimee Gallagher at agallagher@npwh.org or call NPWH at 202-543-9693, ext 5.
eloquently to the Institute of Medicine reports on patient quality and safety. Those reports demanded a shift away from our acute-episode illness system to a comprehensive prevention-based system. One of 1,500 NPs employed in the VA, Penny reminded the Capitol Hill audience that the NP movement began in the 1960s to address access and quality issues, which remain issues today. She described how she functions in the VA and noted that NPs are in every sector of the VA, from heart transplant to solo primary care, and are now doing home-based primary care.

The panel was exceptional in every way—each member had a clear, unique message and included poignant narratives to help policymakers understand how some policies affecting NPs also affect patients. Embedded in these stories were strong messages to policymakers about solutions to some of today’s most pressing health care problems. These 4 panelists performed a great service on behalf of the NP profession that morning in May. The NPs in attendance felt great pride and honor to be among them.

Keep the Messages Alive

During the question-and-answer session, a staff member from Rep. Schwartz’ office urged the attendees to encourage all NPs to participate in the health care reform dialogue, especially with Republicans. She strongly recommended that NPs reach out to Republican members of Congress to tell them our stories and to inform them of our expertise and our outcomes.

NPs on the Edge

Continued from page 3

NPWH Inspirations in Women’s Health

NOMINATION FORM

Nominee’s name and credentials: ________________________________
Licensed/recognized as a nurse practitioner in (list state): __________
Current title/specialty: _______________________________________
Affiliation(s): _______________________________________________
NP education: _______________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________________
Phone numbers: (W)_______________________ (H)_______________________ (C)________________________
Email address: _______________________________________________

Please explain why this NP is an inspiration to others in terms of her/his contributions to women’s health, the community, co-workers, students, or others. Describe what this NP has done that is innovative or beyond what is required in her/his current job position. Give as many details as possible. Please note: (1) The information you provide is the only basis upon which our judges will make a decision; (2) Nominees may help you write this section; and (3) There is a 500-word limit; attach additional pages as needed.

Is this NP involved with a project that would benefit as a result of her/his recognition as a winner of the NPWH Inspirations in Women’s Health Award? If so, please describe ________________________________
Nominator’s name (self-nominations are accepted): ___________________________
Affiliation: _______________________________________________________
Relationship to nominee (Also, please describe how you know this individual and for how long): __________________________
Nominator’s phone numbers: (W)_______________________ (H)_______________________ (C)________________________
Nominator’s email address: _______________________________________

If you are nominating an NP other than yourself, we encourage you to inform this person that she or he has been nominated. It is an honor to be nominated whether or not the NP becomes a finalist. It also eliminates the possibility that the nominee is unable or unwilling, for any reason, to accept the award.

☐ Check here if you wish to remain anonymous to the nominee.
☐ Check here if the nominee is aware that she/he has been nominated.

FORMS SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY AUGUST 28, 2009.
Please fax to 202.543.9858 or mail to Nurse Practitioner Inspiration Award, NPWH, 505 C Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002
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This column is also posted on Carla Mills’ blog, at http://www.maverickhealth.com/blog. She invites readers to post comments on her blog.