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Addiction Stabilization Unit at JFK Medical Center Officially Opens with Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



In a bold move to combat the opioid crisis through evidence-based, medical treatment, the Health Care District of Palm Beach County, JFK

Medical Center and the Palm Beach County Commission unveiled an innovative public-private partnership on February 5, 2020, officially opening a one-of-a-kind Addiction Stabilization Unit within JFK Medical Center's North Campus in West

From left: Alina M. Alonso, MD, Director, Florida Department of Health for Palm Beach County and Health Care District of Palm Beach County Board Member; Doug McGlynn, Deputy Chief of Operations, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue; Commissioner Melissa McKinlay, Palm Beach County District 6; Chief Reginald Duren, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue; Gina Melby, CEO, JFK Medical Center Main and North Campus; Kenneth Schepke, MD, State of Florida EMS Medical Director; Belma Andrić, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer and VP and Executive Director of Clinic Services, Health Care District; Darcy J. Davis, CEO, Health Care District; Nancy C. Banner, Esq., Vice Chair, Health Care District Board; Verdenia C. Baker, Palm Beach County Administrator and Courtney Rowling, MD, Director of Behavioral Health, Health Care District.

Palm Beach.

“From the time a patient suffering from addiction is first treated by fire rescue personnel, to their arrival at this Addiction Stabilization Unit, to the follow-up plan for long-term recovery, the patient is the focus of an extraordinary team of health care providers,” said Darcy J. Davis, Health Care District CEO in her remarks at the ribbon-cutting event. “That team is the result of another groundbreaking team – a public-private partnership that has created a program unique in Florida and one of very few in the U.S.”

Over 350 patients have received specialized care since the unit opened its doors on October 21, 2019. Fire rescue agencies in municipalities throughout the county have adopted protocols allowing them to bypass

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the closest emergency room to transport overdose patients directly to the centralized facility. For patients arriving after an overdose, medication assisted treatment (MAT) is provided within the first few hours of arrival to take away the cravings, minimize withdrawal symptoms and increase the probability the patient will comply with a longer-term treatment plan after discharge.

“Our lives have all been touched by someone that has been lost in the cycle of addiction,” said Gina Melby, CEO of JFK Medical Center Main and North Campus. “This 10-bed unit is staffed with a team of experts which include psychiatrists, Emergency Room physicians, internal medicine physicians, nurses and licensed social workers. Patients receive immediate care and access to treatment to reduce the chance of relapse.”

Once a patient is stabilized and opts to explore long-term treatment options, medical staff recommends the care best suited for the patient. Many of the patients from the unit have received a warm hand-off to the Health Care District’s MAT program, which is conveniently located in an outpatient clinic adjacent to the hospital. There patients are seen by a team of psychiatrists, primary care physicians, counselors specialized in treating addiction and other licensed professional services, including medication assisted treatment (Buprenorphine, Naltrexone and Vivitrol), individual and group therapy, psychiatric services, individualized care coordination, pharmacy services and links to other health and social services.

“This project is our attempt to medicalize addiction and treat it like other medical illnesses,” said Belma Andrić, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer,

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VP and Executive Director of Clinical Services for the Health Care District. “We took a public health approach and set out to change the way care is provided for this very complex, relapsing, lifelong and life-threatening illness for which treatment resources are scarce, fragmented and not very well defined by national medical associations.”



From left: Carlos del Risco Parra, Medical Assistant; Ingrid Barlett, Behavioral Health Coordinator; Alex Pierre Julian; Registration Specialist; Massiel Perez, Licensed Clinical Social Worker; Claudia Rexach, Licensed Clinical Social Worker; and Calalisa Olivier, LPN.

For Palm Beach County Commissioner Melissa McKinlay, the grand opening took on a personal meaning. The unit will display a statue of an angel in memory of Tasha McCraw, the daughter of her former chief of staff, Johnnie Easton, who died of an overdose in 2016. Easton, who attended the event, said her daughter would be proud that those who are at the lowest point in their life can visit the unit and not feel ashamed to ask for help.

“What Tasha loved...is helping other people,” Commissioner McKinlay said in her remarks. “As she’s looking down upon us from heaven, she will be helping other people, too.”

In front of a standing-room only crowd, county leaders praised the initiative as a national model.

“This most importantly will save lives, but it also demonstrates that Palm Beach County continues to be at the forefront in fighting the opioid epidemic,” said State Attorney Dave Aronberg.

“We want to ensure that for all of our residents here in Palm Beach County, if they need assistance for substance use disorder, we have a mechanism for them to receive quality care,” said Verdenia Baker, County Administrator.

In 2017, the Health Care District joined the effort to create an impactful model of care after more than 600 people in the county died from opioid overdoses. The model aimed to provide evidence-based medical treatment, ensure that lifesaving treatment is readily available to the largest number of patients and ensure patients are treated with a warm handoff from the point of emergency overdose treatment through access to long-term treatment.

The plan came together that year after the Health Care District collaborated with Palm Beach County Fire Rescue and JFK Medical Center in a pilot program with 30 patients that applied the MAT approach and confirmed the success found in a 2015 Yale University research study. The pilot program demonstrated that addiction is both a medical condition and a psychiatric illness that needs to be treated under the “house of medicine” like any other chronic medical condition.

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“We realized we as a medical community needed to come together and

get our hands around it,” said Kenneth Scheppke, MD, State of Florida EMS Medical Director. “Our partnership proved that when you treat chronic medical illness with multi-factorial, evidence-based medicine, you get great outcomes.”

The goal is to help treat the whole patient and stop the cycle of repeat overdoses. For uninsured patients, the Health Care District covers addiction treatment costs for eligible county residents. The Palm Beach County Commission has pledged \$1 million to help pay for the care of patients who have no other means.

“The opening of the Addiction Stabilization Unit is a milestone for the Health Care District as a safety net system in our community,” said Leslie B. Daniels, Chair of the Health Care District Board Chair. “The collaborative initiative demonstrates how a public-private partnership is a financially responsible approach to meeting the changing needs of healthcare.”

The Health Care District’s MAT clinic is located at 2151 45th Street, Suite 204 in West Palm Beach and is part of the network of C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics throughout the county. These Federally Qualified Health Centers serve all patients, regardless of their ability to pay, and offer a sliding fee scale. To make an appointment, patients can call 561-642-1000 or visit www.brumbbackclinics.org.

Other dignitaries in attendance included: Mayor Mack Bernard, Palm Beach County Commission; Vice Mayor Robert S. Weinroth, Palm Beach County Commission; Palm Beach County Commissioner Hal Valeche;

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Palm Beach County Commissioner Gregg K. Weiss; Jenny Cesar, Congressional Outreach for U.S. Rep. Lois Frankel; DeBorah Posey-Blocker, District Director for U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings; Jordan Séjour, Congressional Aide to U.S. Rep. Brian Mast; Maria Sachs, Former Florida Senator; Alina M. Alonso, MD, Director, Florida Department of Health for Palm Beach County and Health Care District of Palm Beach County Board Member; Nancy C. Banner, Esq., Vice Chair, Health Care District Board of Commissioners; Fire Rescue Chief Reginald Duren; Chief Deputy Michael Gauger, Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office; Doug McGlynn, Deputy Chief of Operations, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue and Richard Ellis, Division Chief of Medical Services, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue.

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