



Providers & Patients Scrutinize Health Care Equity in the Age of COVID-19

Exton, PA – October 29, 2020 – What is it like for diverse populations to seek – and provide – health care during COVID-19?

Three regional health care leaders, from the city to the suburbs, shared their first-hand perspectives at the Chester County Economic Development Council's 3rd Annual Health Care Connect Innovators Forum.

Held virtually before a wide audience of health care professionals and nursing students on Wednesday, the program highlighted peer perspectives on COVID-19 experiences for diverse populations, social pressures and system advances in the quality of clinical care. [The entire presentation is available here](#), and head shots of the speakers are available upon request.

The first of the presenters was **Talonda Rogers MSN, RN**, who shared her perspective not only as a black female nurse, author and educator, but also her experiences as a patient.

Drawing on [CDC statistics](#) that show women of color are 2.5 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women, she shared her own experience delivering a still born son at 40 weeks as she was on the brink of a diabetic coma. Rogers reported lack of responsiveness from medical staff, a severe delay in treatment, as well as symptoms of gestational diabetes that went unnoticed.

“There’s a very fine line between clinical intuition and unconscious bias,” Rogers said. “What we are told as women of color is that it’s all in your head, all women complain of these things, you’ll be okay. If icons like Beyonce and Serena Williams who can afford the best care are not truly listened to during pregnancy, what chance do the rest of us have? Guess what? We all have unconscious bias, and that leads to detrimental effects for the patient.”

Vanessa Briggs, MBS, RD, President and CEO of Brandywine Health Foundation, provided an in-depth portrayal of the impacts of COVID-19 on the underserved, specifically, residents within the Greater Coatesville community.

“Where you live does matter as to how you fare with your overall health and access to even the most basic health care needs,” Briggs said. She pointed to social determinants of health, including economic stability, community context, neighborhood and education. She also made a key distinction between health “equality” and “equity.”

“Equality makes an assumption that everyone should get the same, equal treatment, and everyone is the same,” Briggs said “But we recognize that there are differences in economic status, education and cultural familiarity. So we need to meet people where they are to support them. When we do that, then we are able to *equitably* provide optimal health care to all individuals.”

Briggs said communities of color have long experienced disparities before COVID-19, including difficulty receiving timely appointments, differing standards for prescribing pain medications and suburban challenges like access to transportation

Dr. Tony S. Reed, MD, MBA, Executive Vice President, Chief Medical Officer, Temple University Health System, has been the incident commander in that health system during COVID-19. Reviewing COVID-19 and the socio-economically depressed population his facilities serve, he noted that 42,000 people have been tested for COVID-19 through Temple University Health System so far, 4,100 people have identified as COVID positive and 2,400 people have been admitted related to COVID-19.

“COVID-19 tested our limits, and we rose to the occasion,” Reed said. “New leadership and new energy has led to preparedness across our five major facilities, three physician practice groups and additional programs.”

Reed pointed to successes including a willingness to go outside Temple University Health System’s planned budget to invest in the funding necessary to be prepared for last spring’s heightened demands despite conflicting guidance from governing bodies including the CDC and WHO.

Reed also noted Temple University Health System’s response programs for the underserved, including a call center that has received 65,000 phone calls devoted to FAQs, averaging about 350 calls per day; community health workers and the Center for Urban Bioethics team remaining embedded; multi-lingual physicians attending tele-community meetings to provide education; and working through local news outlets to continue the flow of information.

The Chester County Economic Development Council’s 3rd Annual Health Care Connect Innovators Forum was moderated by **Dr. Claire Mooney**, President and CEO of Jennersville Hospital/Tower Health. Mooney is also a CCEDC Board Member and Health Care Connect Board Chair.

“We really wanted to look at equity through a different lens – that of the patient as well as the professional,” Mooney said. “Our program creates opportunities to network and interact with key health care leaders in the greater Philadelphia area. And today we had the opportunity to share short-term and long-term solutions that can improve treatment not only during COVID-19, but moving forward.”

Health Care Connect, an initiative of the Chester County Economic Development Council, advocates for the advancement of the health care industry through training, outreach and other industry strategies. HCC is funded in part by the private sector, with grant funding received from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry through the Chester County Workforce Development Board.

The Chester County Economic Development Council is a private, non-profit economic development organization promoting smart growth in Chester County and the surrounding region for more than 50 years. The CCEDC provides proven financing solutions, cultivates workforce talent, leverages business partnerships, and fosters entrepreneurial collaboration. With the support of the private and public sectors, CCEDC initiates, implements and innovates programs that improve the business community and enhance the quality of life in Chester County. For more information, visit <https://ccedcpa.com/>

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