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READER SUBMITTED: Community Health Center, Inc. Receives \$250,000 Grant From Aetna

Eliza Cole, Community Health Center, Inc.

Middletown

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The Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC) has been awarded a \$250,000 grant from health care benefits company Aetna to conduct a two-year study aimed at improving the coordination of health care for low-income and underinsured patients at community health care clinics and similar safety-net health care providers.

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The study's goal is to create a measurement toolkit that can successfully evaluate the levels of care coordination at primary care practices providing outpatient care for underserved populations.

Care coordination is a central component to many health care reform efforts to improve patients' health, patients' experience of care and at the same time lower costs. Care coordination is typically defined as a patient-centered, interdisciplinary approach where all of a patient's needs are managed across providers and settings in an integrated, cost-effective manner.

"According to a study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, primary care physicians for Medicare patients typically share patient care for their caseload with 299 other physicians with whom they should coordinate care," said Daren Anderson, M.D., vice president and chief quality officer of CHC. "Clearly, closely coordinated care is an important strategy to make sure patients have all their health needs addressed and don't receive conflicting instructions, duplicated tests or unnecessary treatments.

"Currently, there are very few tools available to assess the quality of care coordination in various settings, and there are none that are specific to our setting," Anderson said. "Aetna's grant will enable us to address these issues and provide tools to health centers nationwide that are working to improve health outcomes, enhance patient experience and reduce costs."

Anderson and his research team will test the care coordination measures they develop at a cross-section of CHC sites, Connecticut's largest network of Federally Qualified Health Centers. CHC has primary care sites in 13 communities in the state, as well as school-based clinics and mobile dental units. CHC serves 130,000 patients, nearly all living at or below 200 percent of the poverty level.

"The results of CHC's study have implications for similar safety-net settings in the United States," said Gillian Barclay, D.D.S., Dr. P.H., vice president of the Aetna Foundation, which will provide ongoing support for the study. "The more precisely we can envision what coordinated care looks like and how best to weave it into the everyday delivery of health care, the closer we can get to an optimal delivery of care that produces the best outcomes at the lowest cost."

Improving health care through better integrated and more closely coordinated health care is one of the Aetna Foundation's three program areas. In the past two years, Aetna and the Aetna Foundation have directed more than \$2 million in grants for projects in the United States and the United Kingdom to advance integrated health care and measure the effectiveness of different integrated health care models.

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