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ECCO Launches Partners in HealthCare to Serve Low-income and Uninsured

MUSC and Roper St. Francis unite for new initiative

Charleston, S.C. (July 16, 2014): East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO) announces Partners in HealthCare, a new initiative serving low-income, uninsured adults that offers access to health care at no cost to the patient. In collaboration with the Medical University of South Carolina's College of Nursing and Department of Family Medicine, and Roper St. Francis Healthcare, the program focuses on treatment and management of low-income residents living East of the Cooper River, with diabetes, hypertension, and associated conditions of hyperlipidemia, obesity, and tobacco usage.

Almost 20% of tri-county residents lack health insurance, the majority of which are living below the poverty line. This population comprises the typical demographic of ECCO's client base, and represents thousands of individuals in need of regular medical care. Data from client surveys revealed that the poor are unlikely to consume their medications as prescribed and often don't understand their medical conditions or have access to the resources that are necessary to improve their health. In order to better address these issues, ECCO approached MUSC's College of Nursing (CON) for help providing a consistent source of medical care for clients with chronic disease and associated conditions.

The Partners in HealthCare practice started serving patients last month and will continue to operate on Wednesday evenings at ECCO's 14,500 sq. ft. facility on Six Mile Road in Mount Pleasant. Roper St. Francis Healthcare supported the program with a grant that will allow ECCO to send patients for laboratory tests and radiology procedures at no cost to the individual or the organization. Launching the Partners in HealthCare program was made possible through the generosity of a few key funders and the hard work of ECCO Board member Dianne Schuler, and Associate Dean at MUSC's CON, Dr. Deborah Williamson. Schuler, also a retired registered nurse said, "One of our biggest focuses is helping our ECCO clients better understand their condition and prescribed medications." Schuler continued, "Our goal is to improve the health of our community one patient at a time."

The mission of Partners in HealthCare is ultimately to benefit the patients in need but also offers educational opportunities for future nurse practitioners. The program is staffed by four CON faculty nurse practitioners who diagnose and treat patients, and are supported by two CON faculty members who manage student integration, and the coordination of care for clients. CON students work alongside MUSC's distinguished faculty to gain the hands-on practice and knowledge that is critical for nursing professionals in today's complex health care system. Lauren Walden, a third semester student pursuing her BS in Nursing, recently followed two patients with Nurse Practitioner Durham and commented, "Last night I had an amazing clinical experience at ECCO. Not only was I lucky to have an amazing educational experience, I loved the whole environment."

The new initiative falls under the umbrella of ECCO's Health Services program, which includes the dental clinic, emergency prescription medication assistance, health education and wellness classes, and ongoing support through case management. The goal of Health Services of ECCO is to encourage and empower clients to achieve a long-term, systemic change in lifestyle and focuses on personal health responsibility. The addition of Partners in HealthCare expands ECCO's capacity to serve clients in a more comprehensive way through continuity of care. Dr. Williamson said, "Our team of nurse practitioners strives to engage the clients through building relationships and trust."

East Cooper Community Outreach

The mission of East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO) is to provide safety net services to our low-income neighbors, while empowering them to create better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. Founded in 1989 as an emergency relief effort after the devastation from Hurricane Hugo, ECCO strives to eliminate poverty in the East Cooper region, and focuses on three main program areas: Basic Needs, Health Services and Empowerment. More than 4,500 families a year receive emergency assistance for food, clothing, household furnishings and financial aid, and have access to dental care, nurse practitioner appointments, prescription assistance, financial literacy classes, job readiness training, and counseling. For more information, visit www.ECCOcharleston.org.

College of Nursing at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston

The College of Nursing (CON) at MUSC has been preparing professional nurses who care, cure, and create new knowledge in improving the health of individuals, families, and communities for the last 131 years. As a college within the only academic health sciences center in South Carolina, the CON prides itself for being on the cutting edge of health care practice, education and research. The CON was ranked #2 for online graduate programs by US News and World Report and boasts an enrollment of over 250 future primary care nurse practitioners. The CON has the largest accelerated BSN and PhD nursing programs in the state. The College also supports a Center for Technology Applications for Active Living that promotes the use of technology for improving patient self-management and ultimately health outcomes. In addition, the college supports the Center for Community Health Partnerships with faculty and staff who are committed to developing community health partnerships like the collaborative project with East Cooper Community Outreach.

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