

# Petaluma Health Center

PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA

## INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE PROMOTES WELLNESS THROUGH GARDENS, FARMACY AND PLAY

When most people think of a California-based wellness and integrative medicine center, a community health center serving low-income farmworkers may not come to mind. Yet, Dr. Fasih Hameed is changing stereotypes as well as

health outcomes at Petaluma Health Center (PHC) in Northern California. Since starting a small garden program eight years ago, PHC has grown an innovative array of food interventions for the families they serve.

Located in a rural food desert, Petaluma school district data show a third of children are food insecure. Over 50% of youth are over-

weight and obese. Low quality filling food meets caloric needs but not nutritive ones. The situation is more tragic because many of the families are current or past migrant farmworkers. Surrounded by produce fields, they lack access to fresh food for themselves.

The original clinic garden started as a community effort. PHC volunteers dubbed themselves the Gang Green! Produce was given away to patients and used to conduct nutrition and cooking classes. Youth took part through PLAY—Petaluma Loves Active Youth. Overweight children helped garden and also took part in food preparation and in eating together.

When the center relocated, its small gardens were replaced by a huge 10,000 square foot garden. Many volunteers helped with this effort, acknowledging its impact on food security. Produce is distributed to families, used in the pediatric and diabetes programs, and harvested by patients. Anyone can pick ripe produce as long as they don't uproot the plants.

The new site has a teaching kitchen that uses garden produce to demonstrate healthy cooking. Staff worked with the area food pantry to tailor donations to include only healthy choices. Donated food boxes are opened so clients can be shown how to prepare unfamiliar foods. The center even has an online cooking show!

Dr. Hameed started PHC's FARMACY food program several years ago. The PHC FARMACY is an organic food market set up in the health center in partnership with Petaluma Bounty, a community organization that provides multiple programs to expand the community's capacity to feed its members today and into the future. Produce originates from Petaluma Bounty's local nonprofit farm that sells shares to the center as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Gleanings from area farms are also donated. Produce is sold on a sliding fee scale, with CalFresh benefits and Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards and food stamps accepted.

PHC's keys to success? Start small but think big. See gardens as symbols of beauty and plenty, and let that be conveyed to your patients as a symbol for the goodness of their own self-care.

*Petaluma Health Center is countering the reality of high rates of obesity and food insecurity in their farming communities with programs directed at children and their parents that include gardens, play, produce boxes and food preparation.*

# “ START SMALL BUT THINK BIG.



## PETALUMA LOVES ACTIVE YOUTH: PLAY

The PLAY initiative aims to reduce childhood obesity by emphasizing behavioral change, food access and education. Collaborators with PHC include Petaluma Bounty, nutritionists, exercise instructors, college students, neighbors and Kaiser Permanente. Weekly groups held with children and parents have activities that support family change.

The program started with the realization that obtaining labs on an obese child, or referring him to an endocrinologist, didn't fix the problem at the root. Specialty help was two hours away and culturally foreign. Sustainable change required a program that would be acceptable to the child and his or her parent.

Borrowing from the style of an organization called Centering Pregnancy, Dr. Hameed planned group medical visits for the children. Visits include a variety of activities: gardening, food preparation, fun exercise and healthy snacking complement weight and blood pressure checks.

Real change is a slow process, but body mass indexes (BMIs) are trending down. The words of an eight year old: "I like the program because I'm eating healthy foods, and it's helping me lose weight... it's changed my life, so I can be healthier in the future."

## INTERVENTIONS

USING COMMUNITY "CLINIC GARDENS" FOR NUTRITION EDUCATION, TO REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY AND TO FIGHT OBESITY

STARTING THE "PLAY" INITIATIVE (PETALUMA LOVES ACTIVE YOUTH) TO BRING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, THROUGH GARDENING, TO YOUTH

PRESCRIBING GROUP MEDICAL VISITS FOR WELLNESS EDUCATION WITH CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

USING A TEACHING KITCHEN IN THE CLINIC FOR COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS AND NUTRITION EDUCATION

PARTNERING WITH LOCAL FOOD BANK TO OFFER MORE HEALTHY OPTIONS

USING A "FARMACY" PROGRAM WITH SLIDING FEES OFFERED AT A FARMERS MARKET ORGANIZED AT THE HEALTH CENTER

## PARTNERS

BAKER CREEK SEED BANK

CITY OF PETALUMA

COTTAGE GARDENS NURSERY

DAILY ACTS

GREENSTRING FARMS

INTELISYS GREEN TEAM

PETALUMA BOUNTY

PETALUMA COMMUNITY GARDENS

ROGER GADOW

SONOMA COMPOST