

## ***OHSU physicians provide free care to uninsured***

People without insurance rely on low-cost community safety net clinics for primary care, but when acute or specialty care needs arise, uninsured people face daunting obstacles. As part of Project Access NOW, physicians across the Portland and Vancouver metro area have come together to help partly alleviate this problem.

“Project Access NOW is an example of physicians taking the lead to help solve a socioeconomic problem,” said Mike Bonazzola, MD, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine and Chief Medical Officer of the Faculty Practice Plan. Dr. Bonazzola is also the volunteer Medical Director for Project Access NOW, providing medical oversight services.

“OHSU physicians have been involved in Project Access NOW, and a precursor volunteer program, for over a decade. The program has enrolled over 500 patients since March of last year. OHSU physicians have provided the care for nearly 100 of those patients,” he said.

“OHSU really has been a tremendous partner in this effort. We are so thankful to Mike for his leadership and the volunteer time that he dedicates as well,” said Linda Nilsen-Solares, Executive Director, Project Access NOW.

Here is how it works. Patients at or below twice the federal poverty level qualify for primary care at a network of safety net clinics across the region. When a specialty need arises, such as a hysterectomy, cancer treatment or neurological condition, the patient is referred to a specialist in the Project Access NOW volunteer network. The physician time is donated and a participating hospital covers non-physician costs, such as lab work, imaging, inpatient and outpatient services.

“OHSU was the first hospital and health system in Oregon to have 100 percent participation,” said Dr. Bonazzola. “Our leadership has encouraged other hospitals and health systems to commit their employed staff as well.” Every OHSU specialty clinician is a Project Access NOW volunteer.

“Access to health care is a problem that isn’t going to go away anytime soon. But if every physician in the Portland metro area contributed at least one case to an uninsured patient, it would help a lot of people, and it would fairly distribute the financial consequences over our entire provider community,” said Dr. Bonazzola.