



# Working Together for the Greater Good

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Healthcare providers are often our first stop for cancer support, but care can extend beyond the doctor's office. Agencies, charities, and businesses frequently work together to help keep our community healthy.

Robert Boissonneault Oncology Institute is a community partner of the H.U.G.S. (Heartfelt Unconditional Giving) charity in Ocala. RBOI social worker Amy Roberts, LCSW, chairs the Cancer Alliance of Marion County. She said at a recent meeting, "People need to get screened, but what happens if the 'free' screening reveals a very highly suspicious possible cancer?" In other words, what if someone can't afford the cost of follow-up testing?

Fortunately, the H.U.G.S. Bridge the Gap pilot program has partnered with the Marion County Medical Society's We Care program and Gastroenterology Associates of Ocala to help. Federally qualified health centers in Marion County provided initial colon cancer screening and coordinated care. People whose tests

raised red flags but who couldn't access more testing on their own were referred to We Care, which provides free specialty healthcare to those in need. Patients who qualified for Bridge the Gap received colonoscopies at Gastroenterology Associates.

Family medicine specialist Dr. David Willis explains, "Seventy-three percent of the patients who went through had precancerous polyps, and we actually found one cancer, and that patient ... is being treated for their colorectal cancer."

The H.U.G.S.-funded program had spent about \$25,000, but such an investment can save many times that amount in the long run. "If we prevented one early stage cancer, we avoided \$112,000 worth of care," Dr. Willis continues. "And if it had been found late, it would have been more like \$260,000 worth of care." According to the American Cancer Society, the cure rate for early stage colon cancer is close to 90 percent, but plummets to

around 14 percent if found at a later stage. Removing precancerous polyps can help patients avoid treatments like chemo and radiation.

This pilot program is one example of the ways in which multiple sectors in the community can join forces to help people while ultimately driving down healthcare costs. "You can see how all the different agencies feed into each other," Roberts says.

## Helping People Help Researchers

Clinical trials are the gold standard for cancer research. But finding participants can be challenging, especially where travel and lodging costs are concerned.

The recent IMproving Patient Access to Cancer clinical Trials (IMPACT) study used a financial reimbursement program (FRP) that returned up to \$1,500 a month to low-income patients. "Importantly, FRP benefited racially/ethnically diverse populations," says Hala Borno, MD, addressing the American Society of Clinical Oncology's 2020 Quality Care Symposium. "[T]he proportion of non-white patients enrolled in our IMPACT pilot trial was higher compared to the proportion of non-white patients seen at the comprehensive cancer centers in which the pilot study took place."

Clinical trial cost burdens can exclude patients of low socioeconomic status. The IMPACT study shows how to help bridge that gap so that more cancer patients can benefit.

More than  
**25,000**

Referrals aided by  
the Marion County  
We Care Program

More than  
**\$30,000**

Financial assistance  
provided by  
H.U.G.S. Patient  
Financial Assistance  
Program in Marion  
County

**\$5,000**

COVID-19  
Emergency  
Assistance Fund  
grant awarded  
to the Citrus Aid  
Cancer Foundation  
(serving Citrus  
County) by the  
Florida Breast  
Cancer Foundation

**2/27/21**

Nature Coast  
Cancer Crusaders'  
second annual  
cancer walk to  
benefit patients in  
Citrus County



## The Challenge of Meeting Health Care Needs

The Rural Women's Health Project found that 15% of Latina women surveyed in Alachua, Marion, and Levy counties received their medical care through health fairs and health screening events, while 18% received no care at all.

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