



Autism Program

UCFS Healthcare operates an Autism Center led by renowned psychiatrist and Autism Spectrum Disorder specialist Dr. Joel Bregman. The Center serves patients of all ages providing extensive evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of autism. However, the care needs of this population are complex and most patients need assistance navigating available resources. UCFS' mission is to provide comprehensive, wrap-around services for our autism patients by taking an integrated approach to services we offer them.

UCFS currently treats over 400 patients with an autism diagnosis throughout Eastern CT. Since opening in 2015, our Autism Center has seen a steady increase in the number of patients seeking our services. Because UCFS can provide families an umbrella of coordinated services under one roof from a team that works together and can provide support throughout their lifespan, patients come to us from all over the region.

Unfortunately, many insurance companies have yet to recognize the value and importance of these wrap-around services for our patients and often do not fund the cost of the comprehensive evaluation and support we provide. Families caring for someone with autism experience significant financial pressures due to the responsibilities associated with their care. Funding this program will provide us with the opportunity to provide financial assistance to those of our autism patients who are either uninsured or whose insurance does not adequately cover the cost of the autism services we provide.



Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)

The New London Day has reported that, "The city (New London) and surrounding communities are plagued with a persistent opioid crisis." The Griswold area has also been hit hard by the opiate crisis claiming the distinction of having the highest number of Narcan/Naloxone administrations in the first year of this intervention being available.

In 2017, UCFS created a Medication Assisted Treatment Program (MAT) in our Norwich and Griswold health centers. Since that time we have expanded MAT services from one prescriber to seven, including three in our primary care practice. We have also increased the number of clinicians serving this population and added three Recovery Coaches. In 2019, we added MAT services to our New London office. Since 2017, we have treated 225 patients with opioid use disorder. With grant funding, we have also purchased a van so that our Recovery Coaches can meet patients where they are and provide them with assistance with basic needs and bring them to the health center for treatments.

The ability for UCFS to provide MAT treatment to patients living in these communities is crucial to the health of our patients, their families and our communities.

Funding will aide in transforming the lives of our MAT clients who wish to enter the workforce by assisting them with the items needed to gain employment (professional clothing, haircuts, transportation to job interviews, etc.). Funding will also support healthy activities to support a balanced lifestyle such as art supplies for art therapy, bicycles for clients, therapy, yoga and other positive ways to channel their energies.



Patient Basic Needs Support

UCFS serves a vulnerable population of residents who lack resources and face many barriers to living a healthy life. UCFS serves all patients, regardless of ability to pay. As we work with patients to overcome barriers, such as transportation, safe housing, language or cultural barriers, and hunger our staff becomes acutely aware of the stressors patients face. Financial barriers lead patients to avoid care necessary for their well-being and productivity.

A vast majority of these patients cannot pay for our services, even if they have insurance. Copays and coinsurance often stress patients' tenuous financial situations to the breaking point. UCFS offers a sliding fee scale based on income and family size but many times even that is beyond a family's means. In fiscal year 2018 alone, UCFS provided over \$900,000 worth of charity care to our clients – that is care that is unreimbursed and written off by our agency as a loss.

Additionally, the amount of needed treatment not given because a patient knew they couldn't afford care and chose to suffer untreated rather than seek help they couldn't afford is likely an astounding figure. The 2018 Community Health Assessment for our region found that at least 30% of low income residents do not have a primary care doctor.

Funding will allow UCFS to offset the out of pocket costs for patients who are uninsured or underinsured and cannot afford treatment, while also ensuring that UCFS can sustain the quality level of services our patients have come to expect. Our patients will have improved health outcomes and more productive lives because they will both be getting the treatment they need and do not have to worry about the financial toll it will take on them.



LGBTQ

In January of 2019, UCFS Healthcare formed a cross disciplinary task force to assess, identify and develop a plan that acknowledges the unique health care needs for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) patients.

Our Safe Space groups have been hugely successful in supporting this population but we know that access to services especially for those who are gender transitioning is scarce in this area. We also know that the lifetime risks for individuals who are transgender are startling:

- LGBTQ individuals: health disparities linked to social stigma, discrimination, and denial of civil rights. Higher rates of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, suicide and experiences of violence.
- Transgender individuals: 51% have been harassed or bullied in school; 57% have been rejected by their families and 41% will attempt suicide (vs. 1.6% of the general population.)
- CDC: Nearly 2% of high schoolers identify as transgender and more than 1/3 of them attempt suicide, 27% feel unsafe at school, 35% are bullied at school and 35% attempt suicide.
- LGBTQ youth account for 23% of the homeless youth population in CT even though the community represents only about 4% of the state's population
- 22% of the state's LGBTQ residents report not having an adequate supply of food
- 15% of all hate crimes in the state victimized LGBTQ people

UCFS Healthcare is dedicated to meeting the needs of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community as well as those questioning their sexual orientation and sexual identity. Funding will support staff training at all levels to ensure that we have a clear understanding of the unique needs, risk factors and challenges of this population in order to design and deliver the best possible care.