Providing Care for the Underserved at MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital, Leonardtown, Maryland

Background
Founded in 1912, MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital serves the people of St. Mary’s County, Maryland. A not-for-profit, MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital cares for all patients, regardless of their ability to pay. St. Mary’s County is a medically underserved population; according to the County Health Ranking report, St. Mary’s County has 2,350 citizens per one physician, more than double the state and national ratios. The area of greatest concern is Lexington Park, which has the highest number of residents living at or below the federal poverty level and the highest percentage of minorities living with health, social and economic inequities. MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital has a high volume of emergency department (ED) visits from under/uninsured individuals from Lexington Park seeking primary care.

Intervention
Since 2008, MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital has operated the Get Connected to Health program to provide primary medical care to underserved patients with the use of a mobile medical van. Through private contributions and grant funding from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, Get Connected to Health grew from a part-time volunteer practice to a full-time service in 2012. Employing a full-time nurse practitioner, a medical assistant and case manager, the Get Connected to Health mobile medical van offers primary care with integrated mental health services through a partnership with Walden Behavioral Health. Onboard the van, care providers offer flu shots, laboratory testing, pregnancy, blood sugar tests and much more to patients. Instead of going untreated or relying on the ED, patients receive the care they need right in their own neighborhood.

Results
MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital’s Get Connected to Health program grew from 475 patients in 2011 to 2,519 patients in 2013. A recent grant from Dominion Power allowed for the implementation of electronic medical records for Get Connected to Health patients through new computers onboard the mobile health van. These have allowed for: 1) immediate access to patient records and education materials; 2) direct information entry by provider; 3) fewer transcription errors; 4) standardization of documentation; 5) facilitation identification and documentation of chronic conditions; 6) improved immunization management; 7) customizable clinical documentation templates; and 7) a regularly updated drug database which indicates potentially dangerous drug interactions.

Contact Information
MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital
Joan L. Gelrud, RN, MSN, CPHQ, FACHE
Vice President, MedStar St. Mary’s Hospital
(301) 475-6217
Joan.Gelrud@medstar.net