Safety First Medical Clinic to Serve Injection Drug Users

ACR Health has opened a medical clinic to provide health care for injection drug users, including the 1,800 individuals currently enrolled in ACR Health’s Syringe Exchange Program (SEP).

Among the first patients was 32-year-old Jeremy Fiorino, who had used SEP for several years, but has now, with the help of Prevention Health Advocate Peter Emery, successfully completed drug treatment, and has re-engaged with healthcare. “I had some chronic issues stemming from my drug use. Because I trust ACR Health, I felt safe using the clinic. They connected me with a primary care physician to treat my health issues long term.”

Wil Murtaugh, ACR Health Executive Director, called the clinic a foundational event. “This clinic is a next logical step in New York’s quest to end AIDS by 2020. If we can’t get people into healthcare, there’s no hope to end AIDS.”

Injection Drug Users will always be prioritized for service, based on our funding guidelines. Clients do not have to be enrolled in ACR Health’s SEP to participate, but must be classified as an injection drug user. Examples, in addition to illegal substances, are people who inject steroids or insulin, or transgender individuals who inject hormones. Clinic patients are screened by Nurse Practitioners for Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and will receive preventative care.

Dr. Laura Martin, DO, of MyCare Family Practice, is Medical Director of the clinic. The Safety First Medical Clinic was established through a five-year $150,000 per year grant from New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute. In addition to the state grant, Nobel Health Services, Inc. provided a $20,000 grant for general support. Michael Becker, Director of Specialty Pharmacy, says his company invested in the Safety First Clinic because they believe in the work we do. “Noble Health Services is honored to support the mission of ACR Health by providing financial support for the Safety First Health Clinic. Our organizations share a common goal of removing barriers to healthcare in the communities that we serve.”

Injection drug users often suffer from untreated abscesses on their skin where they inject heroin and go without treatment because they are reluctant to engage with the healthcare system. “It takes time and trust to develop a relationship with an active substance user,” said Erin Bortel, Director of Prevention. “They feel safe with us and will more likely use the clinic, which is a stepping stone to permanent healthcare.”
State Senator Patty Ritchie recognized 22 local “Women of Distinction” for their contributions to northern New York at a special ceremony held April 7, 2016 at the historic Roswell P. Flower Memorial Library in Watertown.

“This year’s honorees represent such a wide variety of talents and accomplishments—everyone from educators and community volunteers to individuals in public service and entrepreneurs,” said Senator Ritchie.

“These women are true trailblazers who could have taken their talents anywhere. However, as a community, we’re so very lucky they have decided to put them to use right here in our region. I’m humbled to be able to honor them, and wish them the best of luck as they continue to make a difference.”

“Giving teenagers a shoulder to lean on as they navigate life’s challenges is an important job—and for Hilary Davis, it’s her passion. As the Youth Services Coordinator at ACR Health, Hilary is described as a “champion” when it comes to helping the youth she serves knock down barriers, working around the clock to make sure they are supported. While her focus is youth, Hilary’s impact extends to other generations too. Hilary is seen as an expert in the local community on LGBTQ issues, and is often sought out by schools, universities, businesses, and other agencies to provide cultural competency training. In addition to her work with ACR Health, Hilary is also extremely active in her community and involved in a number of groups including SPOA and Youth Services Network of Jefferson County. While those who know her say Hilary is inspired by those who are passionate about rights and equality, she is quickly becoming someone who is encouraging others to reach new heights.”

“We’re so proud of you Hilary!!! You are doing amazing work in Northern New York communities and I’m so happy you received this special recognition for all that you do!”

Marissa Rice, Director of Youth Services
March 31, 2016 – ACR Health has named Wil Murtaugh as Executive Director to replace Michael Crinnin, who retired last month after serving as Executive Director since 1989.

Mr. Murtaugh has been with ACR Health for 23 years, beginning in 1993 as Development Director and Deputy Executive Director since 2009. He has been instrumental in expanding ACR Health’s work through new programs: Health Homes, which expands care management services to non-HIV positive clients; the Criminal Justice Initiative, which educates inmates about HIV in state correctional facilities; and the Syringe Exchange Program, which makes clean needles available to injection drug users and curtails HIV and hepatitis infections; Narcan trainings for the public; extensive Insurance and Health Care Advocacy programs; expanded HIV and STD testing opportunities; 340b Pharmacy Service; and a larger fleet of mobile prevention outreach units.

Andrew London, Chair of the Board of Directors of ACR Health, said, “The Board of Directors has absolute confidence that Wil has the experience, integrity, and vision required to guide ACR Health into a successful future while maintaining quality and lifesaving programs.”

Mr. Murtaugh was promoted to Deputy Executive Director following 17 highly successful years as Director of Development and Special Projects in which he established three AIDS Walk/Runs that fund ACR Health’s Youth Services programming and emergency client needs throughout ACR Health’s nine county service area. Through his work, Mr. Murtaugh was instrumental in raising the funds needed to create Q Centers for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown. Mr. Murtaugh has worked extensively with local and national foundations; United Way agencies throughout upstate New York; and state and federal governments, substantially increasing funding for programs offered by ACR Health.

“ACR Health is indispensable in the communities we serve, and I am honored to be appointed Executive Director,” said Mr. Murtaugh. “We are an agency to trust in times of crisis. We were born during the AIDS crisis of the 1980’s, and we are responding with the same urgency to the heroin crisis of this decade.”

Mr. Murtaugh received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration with concentrations in Human Resources and Finance at Syracuse University in Utica, NY. He holds a Masters Degree in Economics from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

Mr. Murtaugh is active in his community: past President of the Central New York Community Tennis Association; Board Member of Sedgwick Farm Tennis Club; longtime influential member of the 17th Ward Democratic Committee in Syracuse; and a strong advocate for United Way. He is married to Bill Louer and resides in Syracuse.

“We are an agency to trust in times of crisis. We were born during the AIDS crisis of the 1980’s, and we are responding with the same urgency to the heroin crisis of this decade.”
ACR Health’s 18th Annual AIDS Hike for Life took place at a time when HIV cases are once again on the rise in the Mohawk Valley. The Health Department reported last month that there were 21 new HIV cases in Oneida County last year. That is up substantially from an average of 12 cases in four previous years.

ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh said these new infections are a great concern. “We’ve known for decades you can prevent the spread of HIV with condoms,” said Mr. Murtaugh, who urged everyone to know their status. “Get tested for HIV; if positive, get treated; if sexually active, get on PrEP – the once daily pill that prevents HIV.”

The AIDS Hike for Life would not be possible without the support of our Sponsors: Empower Federal Credit Union, D&O Print Solutions, The Hartford, and McDonalds; Media Sponsors: KISS FM 97.9 & 105.5, Bug Country 99.7 and 101.1, WUTQ, 100.7 FM, and CBS 2 Utica WKTV; In-Kind Sponsors: Bon Appetit Management, CNY Awards and Apparel, Utica Roasting, and Saranac; and special thanks Hamilton Rainbow Alliance.
Before she found ACR Health, Teresa Willems paid a lot of money for the health insurance offered by her employer. Every four months, like clockwork, the cost went up. She couldn’t afford to go without insurance, not with a husband and two young children, so she reached out to ACR Health Navigator Emily Williams who enrolled her in an insurance plan that cost $250 per month for single coverage. The plan was better - and cheaper - than the one through work, but it still took a big hit out of her limited income. She held the policy through 2015, because it was the best deal she could get.

Last December during Open Enrollment, Teresa learned about the new Essential Plan, a low cost/no cost health insurance plan with low co-pays that covers ten categories of “Essential Health Benefits.” Designed to help working people with incomes under $23,540, the Essential Plan costs $20 per person per month; for Teresa and her husband $40 per month, as compared to $250 the previous year, which covered only Teresa.

“Dealing with Emily and signing up for the Essential Plan took a lot of pressure off me. Emily helped me understand all the language and options,” said Teresa, “and this insurance it something we can afford.”

For her part, Navigator Emily Williams has a two-word description of the Essential Plan. “Really, WOW!” Customers often feel this deal is too good to be true. But it is true and it helps young families get the health insurance they need. “This is how insurance should be,” said Williams.

The Essential Plan is free for people making less than $17,655, and was designed specifically for lower-wage earners, according to Steve Wood, ACR Health Assistant Director of Support Services, Insurance Programs. “This plan can change lives and give peace of mind to countless people who previously couldn’t afford health insurance,” said Wood.

Out of 6,000 insurance customers, 764 qualified for the Essential Plan during this past Open Enrollment. People who, like Teresa, needed insurance but could not afford the available options.

Open Enrollment is closed until November 2016. You are eligible to change insurance plans if you have lost your health insurance, changed jobs, or had another major life changing event. Call 800.475.2430 or email navigator@acrhealth.org for more information.

There is no open enrollment period for Medicaid, Child Health Plus or the Essential Plan. You can enroll any time!
Cristina De Moya has been volunteering “randomly” at ACR Health since she was 10 years old. She started soon after her uncle Gustavo was diagnosed with HIV; he later died of an AIDS related illness.

“I remember my first AIDS Walk/Run at Beaver Lake very well, I was 8 and I got lost with my older sister Tiffany. We had outpaced our mother on the nature trail. After stopping at about 7 Surge Soda stops a man came up to us and asked if we were Kristin and Tiffany, my name clearly not being Kristin we both said ‘nope’ and kept walking.” The girls were found about an hour later and, their mother, relieved after her fright, opened up to her girls about why taking part in the AIDS Walk/Run meant so much to their family. “I decided at that moment that when I was old enough I would do more than just walk.”

Two years later, she showed up at Beaver Lake Nature Center for the AIDS Walk/Run and simply asked to be placed somewhere to help. Fast forward to 2010 when Cristina showed up at ACR Health headquarters and asked how she could get more involved. Within a week she joined the Events Committee, a core group that plans and runs five major fundraising events each year.

“Cristina is a quiet tiger,” said Jacki Hannon, Captain of Team COEd, a top AIDS Walk/Run team. “She is ready to do whatever it takes for a cause she believes in and she is dedicated to ending AIDS and supporting the LG-BTQA community. She works behind the scenes, out of the spotlight, to raise thousands of dollars and makes connections throughout the community to support ACR Health. She is a RockStar volunteer on the committee and a great team mate.”

“ACR Health wants the same things I want, equality and an AIDS free world,” said Cristina. “I know many people with HIV and AIDS, and I know many people who are part of the LGBTQA+ community, and knowing that ACR Health has helped MANY of them with no questions asked, just shows how AMAZING the entire staff is.”

ACR Health has a tremendously successful Special Events Department. If you want to join Cristina and help stage top-notch fundraising events, let us hear from you! 800.475.2430 or events@ACRHealth.org.
Final Reflection
by Michael Crinnin

This is my final reflection as Executive Director of ACR Health. By the time you read this I will be exploring the uncharted territory of retirement – uncharted for me!

It has been a privilege to serve in this capacity for twenty-six and a half years, and to have this forum to ‘think out loud’ with those of you inclined to give me an audience.

There is no condensing the significance this time – this journey with the AIDS Task Force of Central New York, AIDS Community Resources, and finally ACR Health: beyond vast…

I feel, as I write, I’m in the presence of those early volunteers who welcomed me here in September of 1989 - who populated the office in more numbers than staff, most of whom were AIDS diagnosed, and all of whom knew the odds were against them - that their time was likely short.

They burned bright, sometimes with brilliance and sometimes with fury: they were not about to go down without a fight, and they were determined to do all they could for those coming after them. I learned the power of ‘anger-for-good’ from these young men and women, the anger that makes one clear headed and purposeful, not simply destructive. They rattled my cage and kept a fire going under me by simply being who they fully were in the midst of the worst epidemic of our times. I will be sorting out their influence for the rest of my days.

I have worked with extraordinary people over my time here, as you might well imagine… I never had to worry about self-motivation; I rubbed shoulders with it daily. If you’ve had the pleasure of knowing our staff and volunteers you know I’m not exaggerating.

We have always served the marginalized and stigmatized, those who found themselves on the outside of ‘polite society’ and mainstream healthcare, and there is no question that will continue. I like to think those sitting on my shoulder and whispering in my ear are proud of our expansion – to those living with other chronic diseases besides HIV, to gay and transgender youth, to men in correctional facilities, to the heroin addicted and the homeless. I’m pretty sure I’m getting the nod…

Gratitude and grief are the emotions I’m most aware of. I will have a hard time leaving my position within this community of determined fighters and optimists. I will deeply miss the day to day rubbing of shoulders that has kept me honest and motivated all these years. That, I realize, is the good news.

Thank you to all who have read me over the years – who have taken the time to praise me and to criticize me – who have kept the dialogue going through the difficult terrain of sexual behaviors and identities, of poverty and privilege, of addiction and harm reduction, of all that is rarely black and white, but then again, often is.

I’m one lucky guy, and I know it… I imagine those uncharted territories out there have plenty more lessons for me, and I’ll sorely miss sharing them here with you.

Changing of the Guard

April 1, 2016

Friends and colleagues gathered to wish Michael well upon his departure after 26 years at the helm of ACR Health.

“In the photo, you see me standing with Wil Murtaugh, the new Executive Director of ACR Health, to celebrate Michael’s career and accomplishments,” said Andrew London, 12-year veteran of ACR Health’s Board of Directors. “Michael’s forward-thinking and passion about the issues, and the amazing staff at ACR Health, have left an immeasurable impact on the health and well-being of so many.”

Well done, Michael; you have done remarkable things in your 26 years as Executive Director. Thanks, and enjoy your retirement!
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ACR Health is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 7, 2016 – Saturday
Laverne Cox – Ain't I a Woman
8:00 p.m. Jefferson Community College, McVean Gym. $10 for general public; students free. More at http://acrhealth.org/events/upcoming-events

May 21, 2016 – Saturday
Volley for the Dough
Volleyball Tournament benefiting Team Stumblers in the 24th Annual AIDS Walk/Run. Cheap Seats Sports Bar, Oswego 10:00 a.m. Sign up your co-ed team today for $150 entry fee. Call Margi at 343.4676

June 5, 2016 - Sunday
24th Annual AIDS Walk/Run
5K walk and 10K timed run at 10:00 a.m. at Beaver Lake Nature Center. ACRHealth.org/events

August 28, 2016 - Sunday
4th Annual Bubble Blast Run at the Great New York State Fair
Run through the new midway at 10:00 a.m. Sunday, blasting through bubbles and obstacles. For registration information: ACRHealth.org

COMMUNITY EDUCATION FORUMS
Forums provide HIV education to community members and those interested in becoming volunteers. Events are held monthly in Syracuse and Utica. Call 800.475.2430 to sign up.

LGBTQ YOUTH SUPPORT GROUPS
ACR Health has numerous programs for LGBTQ youth, including support group meetings in Syracuse, Utica, Watertown, and the Mohawk Valley. Participants are grouped by ages from 8-26.

The Q Center for a full listing

Q Center Syracuse
617 West Genesee Street
Call 315.701.2431 or QCenter@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Utica/Mohawk Valley/Little Falls
Call 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or GLBTQYouth@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Watertown
Call 315.785.8222 ext. 164 or HDavis@ACRHealth.org

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