

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
August 13, 2009

Steve Kirkland  
Blue Ridge Community Health Services  
Tel 828-233-2204  
Fax 828-692-4396  
[skirkland@brchs.com](mailto:skirkland@brchs.com)



**GUEST EDITORIAL/OP-ED  
BY  
RONNIE REID, BOARD CHAIR, BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES**

While the health care debate appears to be reaching critical mass on the national stage, there is a local organization that is quietly and efficiently providing a model for specific and affordable health care. For forty five years, Blue Ridge Community Health Services (BRCHS) has worked to fulfill its mission of increasing access to health care for all, with special emphasis on the underserved and uninsured.

As the local population has grown, BRCHS has expanded its services and sites to continue to meet the demonstrated need. There are currently six BRCHS sites, including a primary care practice, a pediatric practice, a dental center, and three school-based health centers, that now serve our community.

A non-profit organization governed by a community Board of Directors, BRCHS is a critical component in the local health care delivery system, providing basic comprehensive care to close to 14,000 patients annually.

So, who uses our services? In 2008, our case mix included uninsured (63 %), Medicaid (20%), Private Insurance (10%) and Medicare and other public (7%). The recession is also driving a new wave of unemployed and uninsured patients to our doors. Unable to afford premiums, people are abandoning their insurance coverage and often taxing or inappropriately utilizing emergency rooms for reasons that could be prevented if they had a health care home.

BRCHS strives to be that medical home for those with or without insurance and provides reduced-cost care based on ability to pay. How does our organization match up with other health care providers? Our staff is made up of board-certified physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and we are accredited by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Health Care Organizations.

BRCHS understands the importance of partnering with other organizations to not only provide direct client services, but also community outreach and educational encounters. We are proud of our collaborations with organization such as The Free Clinics, Partnership for Health, the County Departments of Public Health and Social Services, United Way, the Community Foundation, Henderson County Public Schools, Pardee Hospital, Park Ridge Hospital, El Centro, Mainstay Domestic Violence Shelter, WCCA and a host of other local nonprofits, businesses, and individuals who support our mission.

Through this comprehensive engagement with people and organizations in Henderson County, BRCHS sits poised to enter a new era in the provision of health care services. We literally squeezed the life out of the 60 year-old farmhouse that is the core structure of our family practice

facility. Deterioration of this building lead to health and safety concerns for patients and staff. We have entered into temporary quarters, but are busting at the seams with over 100 patient visits per day.

Plans are in the works to build a new 27,000 square-foot facility that will allow for more providers and treatment rooms as well as new or improved ancillary services, equipment and information technology systems. It will take a combination of federal and local support to make this plan a reality, but we believe that we cannot afford not to make this investment now. Given our volumes in the best of times, much less the strains of the recession and possible larger caseloads under reform, BRCHS must take the necessary steps to move forward for the health of our community.

What would you do if you or your loved ones were unable to afford medical care for acute illness, minor injuries, management of chronic diseases, well-child/preventative care exams, dental care, etc?

Join me in thinking about that for a moment and while you are at it, also join me in saluting the providers, staff, volunteers and donors that comprise our jewel of a local health care system, Blue Ridge Community Health Services, during National Health Center Week, August 9-15. Get well. Keep well.

Ronnie Reid

Board Chair, Blue Ridge Community Health Services

First Citizens, Senior Vice President of Banking Services

###