

Lawndale Christian Health Center
2023 Spring Newsletter



LAWNDALE CHRISTIAN
HEALTH CENTER
Loving God. Loving People.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Letter from the CEO

Dear Friends of LCHC,

As spring arrives, I reflect on my tenure as CEO of LCHC, which began in January 2022. During this time, I have listened, learned, and grown personally.

I am humbled to share that I successfully defended my doctoral thesis at Northern Theological Seminary on March 22, 2023. I thank God for this achievement and for the overwhelming support and congratulations I have been given. As I prepare to graduate, I honor my late parents, James & Mary Brooks, who moved to North Lawndale in the late 1950s and never had the opportunity to attend college. This milestone is not mine alone. It is a testament to the community effort that has brought me this far. I am deeply grateful to those who encouraged me when I wanted to give up.

My aspiration is to serve as an encourager to our staff who are also pursuing career growth. We are inspired by our six newly matched family medicine residents. We are grateful that God is using LCHC to offer affordable and quality healthcare and to train the next generation of health professionals.

I have learned that any achievement in life requires the support of others. If LCHC is to continue our good work, it will take all of us - board, staff, community, and partners - working together to care for one another. We have adopted a vision for 2023: Care Together. We have been inspired by the example of the four friends in Mark 2 who carried a paralyzed man, lowering him through a roof to be healed by Jesus. Bringing people to healing requires us to care in four primary categories: care of self, one another, our patients, and our community.

You will see aspects of care in each story of our newsletter. Care might come in the form of pathways for our staff to grow in their careers. Sometimes care happens as our staff members step up for each other. Care can even happen through a hot breakfast in the Green Tomato Café.

Thank you for the ways you continue to support, participate with, and pray for Lawndale Christian Health Center. Care together truly takes each one of us.



James Brooks, DMin, MDiv
CEO, Lawndale Christian Health Center



Gifting a Smile

Althea Brinker Thomas came to LCHC in 1999 when the dental clinic still shared a space with LCHC's optometry services. Little did she know she would stay for over 20 years, developing a career in dentistry and falling in love with serving the community. She shares, "The health center grew into something I never imagined I would still be a part of."

Althea initially had an interest in the medical field, but it was her own dentist who introduced her to dental hygiene. Drawn to Lawndale's mission, Althea found joy in serving the community and sharing her knowledge. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Althea was awarded the opportunity to expand her career by becoming a Public Health Dental Hygienist with the support of LCHC's development team. As a Public Health Dental Hygienist (PHDH) Althea could now provide care and education to a wider variety and increased volume of patients without the oversight of a dentist.

Today, Althea's favorite part of being a PHDH is the personal connection she creates with her patients. "I feel like a beautician or a barber." She explains, "patients sit down and feel really comfortable with me. Sometimes we talk about things that have nothing to do with dental hygiene, and they ask me questions that they may not ask the dentist, that they may be embarrassed about. But there's no judgement in my chair, ever." Althea is passionate about empowering her patients to take control of their own oral hygiene by explaining their x-rays and educating them on dental health best practices. She even goes the extra mile by calling patients at home to check on their progress. "I always ask patients, 'Are you happy with your smile?'"



Althea is also committed to building healthy dental hygiene habits for children. "If we can get the kids practicing good oral health from the start, then they tend to carry that on throughout adulthood. By introducing them so much younger, at your day care centers and school programs...we can put them on the right track." She offers a wealth of resources and motivation for everyone.

Althea's inviting presence quickly wins over the hearts of her patients. Despite the PHDH program requiring her to see 30 patients in one year, she has surpassed that within a few months. This success is a testament to her genuine interest in serving her patients holistically.

Breaking Barriers to Healthcare

The healthcare landscape is not an intuitive one for most people, and often patients who need specialty care struggle to navigate a complex system of referrals, coverage, networks and scheduling. However, care at LCHC goes much deeper to ensure accessibility for all patients. Referral Coordinators (RCs) such as Mary Garner act as the “glue” that connects patients with the specialty care they need by setting up appointments, verifying insurance, and processing referrals. She recognizes the difficulties patients face in understanding clinical processes and scheduling, especially for patients and caregivers who are often already overwhelmed with health concerns. Mary lessens the burden by being a source of clarity and an advocate for LCHC patients, while building long lasting, trusting relationships.

Mary’s eight years of experience have made her an expert in her field, and she takes pride in her work. She is the bridge between providers and patients. Mary uses her strength in communicating medical language and practice to ensure each patient and caregiver is confident in clinical details. After meeting the daughter of one of her patients, Mary was greeted with a heartfelt hug as a token of gratitude for her help. Mary shared that she is motivated by “having patients know they can depend on the RC to take care of their appointments and put patients first.” She often says that “every patient has a story” and her role is to help patients feel seen and known.

Mary’s dedication and attention to detail have also helped her catch errors in insurance coverage. When a hospital specialist’s office informed her that one of her patients was required to pay \$80 out of pocket for each of the six appointments he had scheduled, Mary dug deeper into the patient’s insurance and discovered that he actually had full coverage.



When Mary communicated this to the patient, he initially was wary of her findings. However, through perseverance, Mary was able to gain the patient’s trust and help him find his unread insurance documents to reduce the charges, exemplifying Lawndale’s commitment to serving patients. Whenever patients apologize for making frequent calls, or ask why she goes out of her way to assist them, Mary reminds them, “I appreciate you for allowing me to assist you. Please do not hesitate to call me if you need any help. I am here for you.”



Journey to Better Health

For Silvia Gonzalez, care at LCHC has touched nearly every aspect of her life. She has found a comprehensive range of services at LCHC, from primary care for her overall health and diabetes at the Homan Square clinic to dental and eye care on Ogden, all of which contribute to her overall wellbeing. She enjoys the delicious grits at Green Tomato Café after appointments, and fresh groceries through the VeggieRx program. When she needs medicine, she uses the pharmacy's automated service for refills, and when COVID-19 emerged, she took advantage of the curbside clinic's vaccine offerings. As Silvia shared, "all the services complement each other, and it helps me to stay on top of my health."

Beyond her physical health, Silvia values the cultural and communal provision at LCHC, where she experiences a sense of belonging that transcends language barriers. Communicating in Spanish is not an issue at LCHC where more than half of the staff are bilingual and translators are available at every appointment. Silvia connects easily with providers who share her cultural background, as both she and her daughter have seen the same provider for many years.

In addition to the cultural connection, Silvia cherishes the spiritual bond she shares with her care team. They have prayed together during appointments and her daughter's pregnancy, which is especially meaningful to Silvia as a Latina woman of faith. "The fact that my care team can pray with me and provide that for me is something I really love," says Silvia. This spiritual connection exemplifies the trust between provider and patient that is an essential part of care at LCHC.



"I love it here because it offers me everything I need."

Silvia recognizes the instrumental role her care team has played in helping to manage her diabetes, "Sometimes I feel like they care more about my health than I do." Her care team consistently reminds her of her appointments, checks her blood sugar levels, and guides her every step of the way. While she takes responsibility for her health, Silvia is grateful for the care and support she receives at LCHC. By addressing cultural, spiritual, and physical needs, LCHC physicians and staff provide holistic care to all patients. As Silvia says, "I love it here because it offers me everything I need."