

Portland Metropolitan Area

Charity Care Policy and Procedure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2000, after several months of meetings, in a process facilitated by Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHHS) Portland Service Area Hospitals completed the development of uniform financial assistance policies and procedures. Key components of their agreement included:

- ?? 100% assistance for families at or below 150% Federal Poverty Level. Partial assistance for families between 150-200% of FPL. Case-by-case consideration of assistance for families above 200% FPG.
- ?? Financial application and materials written in at least four most frequently used languages at grade school reading level.
- ?? Published communications such as signs, business cards, in key access points specifically: emergency rooms, admitting, business/patient account offices, urgent care centers. Notification of assistance on every bill sent to patients (when technically possible).
- ?? Brochure available to public that explains the Financial Assistance process in user-friendly terminology. Information about assistance available during registration process. If a person's situation changes, they can reapply for assistance.
- ?? Standardized application process in Portland area.

In March 2001, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems encourage all of its affiliates to seriously consider adopting the policies and procedures developed during the Portland area process. Several have already done so. * 1

Portland area hospital financial assistance policies and procedures have been in place for one year. Throughout the year, representatives of Portland's health safety net, the Oregon Health Action Campaign, Tri County Communities in Charge and the Portland service area hospitals have continued to meet to discuss successes, challenges, and components of an evaluation of financial assistance policy implementation.

*1 A slightly different version of uniform financial assistance policies and procedures had been adopted by the four unaffiliated hospitals in Marion and Polk counties in March 1999. The two hospitals in Lincoln County agreed to adopt the Association recommendations in April 2001.

This document describes the chronology of events leading up to the Portland area agreement; the historical and legal framework for provision of charity care / community benefits; components of the consumer research that highlighted the problems with patient access to information about charity care / financial assistance; and steps that must still be taken to ensure that all those eligible can learn about and take advantage of the opportunity to apply for financial assistance.

It has been compiled in hopes that it may provide guidance to other health institutions and health advocacy organizations struggling with ways to provide universal and affordable access to some level of health services in the long dawning of the systemic and policy reform necessary to bring out universal coverage.

About the key participating organizations

Coalition of Community Health Clinics: A network of private, non-profit community clinics in the Portland Metropolitan area that provide primary health care services to people who have no access to mainstream healthcare. Clinics represent a large portion of the urban “safety net”, assuring quality primary health care services to those unable to receive them in traditional medical settings.

Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems

OAHHS MISSION

Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems is a statewide association dedicated to providing representation, advocacy and assistance for hospitals and healthcare systems. The association, through leadership and collaboration among healthcare providers, promotes quality healthcare that is adequately financed and universally accessible.

Oregon Health Action Campaign (OHAC): A coalition of individuals and organizations committed to empowering the consumer voice in the development of health systems that give all people access to the care they need, when they need it, from providers of their choice at an affordable cost. OHAC houses the Mergers, Acquisitions and Community Benefits Taskforces, and the Portland and Marion/Polk County Community Benefits Taskforces.

Tri-County Communities in Charge

The Tri-County Communities in Charge (TCCIC) initiative is a local initiative with focus on healthcare access for all within the Portland Metropolitan region. This initiative has built on a community consensus around two themes that serve as the foundation for the community’s approach to care for the uninsured. The two themes are:

1. Refine and restructure the safety net system to utilize existing resources with greater efficiency and effectiveness; and
2. Increase access for defined populations and sub-populations through well-planned investment of resources for system expansion.

The Tri-County Communities in Charge initiative emphasizes a process that will develop the existing healthcare safety net into a well functioning and integrated system of care for the uninsured. The three major components employed to accomplish these tasks include:

- ?? A Safety Net Authority to organize and govern the safety net system.
- ?? An Outreach and Education Program to promote of the safety net and other resources.
- ?? A uniform Charity Care Policy to be implemented by local hospitals.