



April 29, 2021

Dear Beach Health Clinic Volunteers and Friends,

The Beach Health Clinic (BHC) was established in 1985 to provide access to quality healthcare for those people in our community who experienced limited or no reasonable access to such care. Through the efforts of past and present volunteers like yourselves, we have more than fulfilled our mission over the 35 years of our existence. For that the Virginia Beach community thanks you and applauds you.

On March 23, 2010, The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law. With this signing, after many attempts, our Federal Government finally took steps to address the healthcare access problem facing many of our fellow citizens. The effect on the BHC was a significant decline in the number of patients seeking our assistance. With the expansion of Medicaid in our Commonwealth on 1/1/2019, we began seeing a further drop in patients needing our services. This overall decline has been significant. Our statistics on numbers of patient visits, number of unduplicated patients, and numbers of new patients bear this out. Pre-ACA our number of patient visits was approaching 16000 yearly. This number has dropped since the ACA and since Medicaid expansion to now less than 1000 yearly. Our number of unduplicated patients has dropped from around 2300 to less than 100. And our number of new patients yearly has dropped from over 600 to only a handful. This has continued to occur in the last year or two, even though we have loosened our income requirements from only accepting uninsured patients with income less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level to accepting patients with income less than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. Yes, the pandemic has probably played a role in the drop within the last year. But in essence, even before the pandemic, the numbers indicate we were no longer needed in our community. Ironically this a good development for the healthcare of those we have so faithfully served over the years. They now have access to affordable, quality healthcare within the established medical community.

Yet, it is with mixed feelings that the Board of Directors of the BHC realizes “the handwriting is on the wall”. We all have loved volunteering at the BHC and working together with all of you as a team. But, it is time for us to cease operations and close the Clinic. At our Board meeting on 4/8/2021, the Board unanimously voted to close the Beach Health Clinic. Our plan is to cease taking new patients into the medical clinic as of 7/1/2021 and the dental clinic as of 6/1/2021, and cease seeing all patients as of 12/1/2021. We are not alone in having to take such steps. All over the Commonwealth “free” clinics are closing. Many of those that are not closing, like our neighboring much larger Chesapeake Care Clinic, are now accepting patients from an entire region - for example Chesapeake is accepting patients from all over Hampton Roads. Many other clinics are transforming into clinics for underinsured and uninsured people by charging the uninsured according to a sliding scale fee schedule and accepting Medicaid and Medicare patients. Thus, they are healthcare businesses and becoming Medicaid and Medicare providers, a major undertaking requiring many more staff, sophisticated billing systems, sophisticated computerized medical record systems, and paid and/or contracted providers. We cannot go in this direction. Our paid staff are few and not

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“healthcare business people”, our providers are mostly retired volunteers with volunteer-only licenses who would now have to activate their licenses, seek Medicaid and Medicare provider numbers, acquire their own medical malpractice insurance etc., and the BHC would require a significant infusion of capital to fund the infrastructure needed. Over the next few months we will be creating a “blueprint” and timeline for our closure. We will be creating a communication plan for most importantly our remaining patients, but also our community, the local health systems, the physicians who see our patients in their private offices, the City of Virginia Beach, and the public. Our most important job as we start the process of closing is finding appropriate continuing care for our existing patients. We will be assisting as many as can qualify for the application process to obtain insurance with the ACA or Medicaid. We will begin arranging referral for continuing care to the Chesapeake Care Clinic, or even with some private providers on a (to use a legal term) “pro bono” basis. We will keep you informed of the progress in our closure and any assistance we may need from each of you individually. And please do not hesitate to call, speak with, or email me or Susan with any questions, concerns, or ideas you may have.

One last issue. Many of you may have heard that Susan Hellstrom, our dedicated, enthusiastic, and caring Executive Director has decided to retire. I truly believe that without Susan’s leadership as well as being the “go-to” person regarding every aspect of BHC operations, we would have reached the stage of closing long before now. But, yes, she has submitted a letter of retirement. However, she and I have been discussing the fate of the BHC long before she made this decision and Susan has agreed to stay “on-board” as long as it takes to wind down and close the BHC. With her leadership, unbounded energy, and the hard work and input from the Board and all of you we can achieve closure successfully and without hurting any of the people we all volunteered to serve. And we can end the story of the BHC with a smile and the satisfaction of a job well done!

God Bless all of you! You are the most dedicated and caring people I have ever worked with and I thank you and I know our community thanks you!

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