



Voices for Georgia's Children - Health Advocacy

By Joann M. Yoon



At Voices, we stand by the mantra that *there are no do-overs for childhood*. But what does this mean in terms of health reform? It means that we have to take a critical look at our broken system and implement those changes that will work for all of us, including kids. Accordingly, as a statewide non-profit, non-partisan policy and advocacy organization that cares deeply about kids, Voices has made it a priority for us to speak out on behalf of children. We want to bring to light the dire reality of many children in our state and we want to ensure that all children are considered and valued as decisions are made. Because health reform is somewhat of a moving target at present, Voices began by developing and adopting a core set of principles related to children that we want to see incorporated within health reform. Following is further explanation of each principle and how health reform can work to achieve these goals.

Do no harm to children. Changes to health reform must build upon our existing infrastructure. Despite inadequacies that exist within our Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids programs, Georgia has made great strides in covering a large number of children under these programs. In this economic downturn when more and more working families are unable to afford coverage for their children and for the first time are turning to Medicaid or PeachCare, these programs are important now more than ever. Voices advocates for protection of health coverage for children enrolled within these two pro-

grams, especially those children who are members of mixed immigration status families. With much discussion about moving Medicaid- or PeachCare-enrolled children into an exchange, it is important to ensure that coverage continues without interruption and that coverage within the exchange is as good as or better than the programs that currently exist.

Insure all children. Health reform should reach the estimated 9 million American children who remain uninsured, about 307,000 of whom live here in Georgia. When kids have health coverage, they are 10 times more likely than uninsured kids to receive the care they need. Increased coverage means an increased number of Georgia children who are healthier and more successful in school. Targeted outreach and enrollment strategies will go a long way toward covering Georgia's uninsured children, as an estimated 2/3 of all uninsured children are eligible for coverage through either Medicaid or PeachCare.

Cover children from head to toe. Kids are not just "little adults"—they need comprehensive coverage that meets their unique needs as they develop from infants to adults. This need for

adequate coverage and access to care must include all needs of children, including oral and mental health needs as well.

Invest in child health quality improvement initiatives. It's not only important that children have health coverage and access to care, but we must insure that child health outcomes improve here in Georgia. Georgia continually ranks within the bottom states in terms of child health and wellbeing indicators. There is much room for improvement, and health reform should encompass provisions to help strengthen and support the implementation of child health quality improvement initiatives.

Within recent conversations on health reform, there has been much expressed opposition to coverage for those from immigrant communities, including immigrant children. The only way to counter these statements is for all of us to speak up on behalf of our communities and to tell our elected officials that we want for them to exhibit leadership and to advocate for the wellbeing of all Georgians.

In order to predict what the future of Georgia will look like, the best indicator is to look at our children. If we want to maximize the overall physical, emotional, and economic health of our state tomorrow, we need to invest in the health of *all* children today.

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From the Executive Director

by Yolanda Hallas

It has been 3 months since I accepted an invitation to serve as the first Executive Director for the Hispanic Health Coalition of Georgia, Inc., (HHCGA). I was serving as a board member at the time representing my then employer, AARP.

Like many of our organizational and private members, I felt the need to connect with an organization that was addressing the challenges facing our Hispanic/Latino immigrants and communities, especially as it relates to access to health and economic security.

The Hispanic Health Coalition of Georgia (HHCGA) Board has positioned itself as the

only organization addressing the healthcare needs of our Georgia Hispanic/Latino population, connecting other organizations to ensure that the rights to culturally and linguistically appropriate information is met and made available, to advocate for the rights of children of the undocumented who are entitled to receive Medicaid can do so, and that our public hospitals fulfill their mission to provide quality access to medical care to the most vulnerable. There is much yet to be done to advocate for our community but I, along with our talented Board of Directors and our small staff, are up for the task. We are shaping our future strategic goals, meeting the expecta-



tions of the recent HHCGA Latino Health Summit with our work groups to meet those demands. We are also seeking the funding to grow our staff capacity to connect and influence policymakers. I am very hopeful and enthusiastic about our accomplishments and potential.

Photo: atlantalatino.com

The Hispanic Health Coalition of Georgia's vision is to empower the Hispanic/Latino community to achieve optimum health and well-being.

The Grady Problem Falls Heaviest on Latinos/Immigrants in Georgia

HHCGA Health Equity Advocacy Committee

The Hispanic Health Coalition of Georgia has advocated on behalf of the rights of the Latino community at Grady meetings for many years now. Most recently, our Executive Director, Yolanda Hallas, made a public comment at the September 14, 2009 Grady Memorial Hospital Board of Directors meeting. Ms. Hallas voiced concerns about the policies and practices in place since April of this year, whereby the door to healthcare at Grady is being closed to Latino/other immigrant families. Limited English Proficient (LEP) DeKalb and Fulton residents, applying for the Grady Discount Card through Grady Financial Counseling Services, are not being treated according to written policies. We believe that they are being treated in a culturally incompetent manner and in many cases, discriminated against on the basis of national origin. This group of patients is becoming marginalized at an alarming rate and their increasing burden of experience with disparities in healthcare, at Grady hands, is both unlawful and immoral. The HHCGA harks back to the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhuman".

The Grady Problem recently received national exposure in a "Kaiser Health News" article by Andy Miller, see <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Stories/2009/October/02/grady.aspx>



Photograph published by atlantaprogressiveblog.com

The HHCGA is cited as the local organization speaking on behalf of Latinos, "Tighter rules.....eliminating workers paid in cash.....are squeezing Latinos out of the Grady system". Grady Health Systems CEO, Michael Young, is quoted as saying, "Patients will have to take some responsibility (for payment)". Most of us who work with this population realize that Latinos are perfectly willing to pay for services rendered; discounted care, not free care is sought by these low income families.

Take the example of a simple clinic visit for a "depo provera", a birth control injection. At a Grady clinic, this would cost the patient, who does not have a discount card, \$200; this is an unaffordable fee for persons living at the federal poverty level. Grady's stated mission, "to serve the underserved... in a compassionate, culturally competent, ethical and fiscally responsible manner", is seriously off target of late.

Most recently, the HHCGA leadership

joined efforts with the Grady Advocates for Responsible Care to ensure that ALL Grady Dialysis Clinic patients threatened with the closure of the hospital's dialysis clinic would be treated responsibly and humanely. HHCGA members/friends with legal/social work/interpreter experience who can volunteer with that organization over the next three months, are encouraged to contact Dorothy Leone-Glasser at dlg@wisdomofwellnessproject.com

The HHCGA Health Equity Advocacy Committee continues to collect stories of Latinos suffering unfair treatment by Grady Health Systems. Be sure to contact the committee if you have patients denied access or if you yourself wish to join the work of the committee. Long ago it was said by Paolo Freire, "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to remain neutral."

Grady Advocates for Responsible Care

The Grady Advocates for Responsible Care is an alliance of physicians, medical care providers, medical/patient organizations, human rights organizations, and patient advocates that was formed out of concern for the patient's lives at the Grady Health System. Let's keep the Dialysis Clinic open. To help support all these patients please contact Dorothy Leone-Glasser, RPN, HHC, CEO, 404.633.5843 or e-mail: dlg@wisdomofwellnessproject.com



OCTOBER IS
NATIONAL BREAST
CANCER AWARENESS
MONTH

NOVEMBER IS
AMERICAN
DIABETES
MONTH

