



July 15, 2021

Thank you for submitting a nomination for Darlene Melk, MD, FAAP.

Overview

Thank you for your 2021 Community Star Nomination. Here is a copy of the nomination for your records. If you have any questions, please reach out to NRHD Community Star Project Coordinator, Brea Corsaro at bcorsaro@powerofrural.org.

Your Information

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Community Star Nominee: (Individual)

Darlene Melk, MD, FAAP

Chief Medical Officer

Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc.

Douglas, Alabama

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Have Questions? Contact:

powerofrural.org | nosorh.org | bcorsaro@powerofrural.org



Which best describes the organization your nominee is associated with?

Certified Rural Health Clinic

Please describe your connection to the individual or organization you are nominating.

Dr. Darlene Melk is the health service provider representative on the Cochise Regional Partnership Council. Dr. Melk moved with her family to Cochise County in 2010 after being hired as a community pediatrician for Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc. (CCHCI). Dr. Melk currently serves as the Chief Medical Officer for Chiricahua Health Systems. Dr. Melk is passionate about the importance of early, quality education in young children and knows that this affects a child's overall future health. Dr. Melk lives in Douglas with her husband and their four sons.

Please explain the individual's or organization's connection to or interaction with their State Office of Rural Health.

University of Arizona Zuckerman College of Public Health As Arizona's first and only accredited college of public health, the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health offers tremendous opportunities to its students for education, research and community involvement thanks to a locale rich in history, research opportunities, and university academic resources. CCHCI has received episodic funding from College of Public Health's Rural Health Outreach Program for various binational border events.

publichealth.arizona.edu

CCHCI is a mission-driven Federally Qualified Health Center [tax exempt not-for-profit 501(c)3] founded as a grassroots community effort in 1996.

Beginning as makeshift clinic in a rural town's small community center, we have since grown to be the largest primary care organization in southeastern Arizona. Our leadership and providers come from all areas of the country and bring with them a diversity of both professional and personal experiences. Although we are certainly not a homogenous group in our backgrounds or beliefs, we unite behind CCHCI's steadfast belief that ALL people deserve access to excellent healthcare.

The Community Star Recognition Program is designed to honor those whose contributions are making a difference in rural through collaboration, education, innovation, and communication. What do you believe to be your nominee's "star" qualities? Provide examples of how your nominee demonstrates these qualities in their work and service.

Dr. Melk believes in community medicine. In order to provide the highest quality and most comprehensive care to her patients, she need partners. At CCHCI she developed care coordination programs, nursing expertise, and administrative support to practice the kind of medicine that everyone deserves.

As the daughter of a political refugee from Cuba, she was able to gain an inside view of the barriers that her mother experienced when trying to access services for her family. Not only was it difficult to communicate at times, but the culture was entirely new to her. Helping the underserved would become her focus after graduating from the University of Arizona College of Medicine. Knowing that intervening early in children's lives ensures their best chance for a healthy future, she has focused her career on those children with the least access to quality medical care.

Dr. Melk was instrumental in developing innovative programs throughout rural Cochise county to include: NCQA's Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) Recognition program is the most widely adopted PCMH evaluation



program in the country. Approximately 13,000 practices (with 67,000 clinicians) are recognized by NCQA. More than 95 organizations support NCQA Recognition through providing financial incentives, transformation support, care management, learning collaborative or MOC credit. The patient-centered medical home is a model of care that puts patients at the forefront of care. PCMHs build better relationships between patients and their clinical care teams. PCMH certified Health Clinics supports each patient and recognizes the patient's need to have an ongoing relationship with their Primary Care Physician. Each provider is part of a Care Team that takes a whole person approach to caring for patients. Our patients are a vital part of their own care team and Chiricahua recognizes the importance of each patient's values and culture. Quality of Care and safety are at the forefront in the PMCH model. We ensure quality of care and patient safety by:

Advocating for our patients to achieve positive health outcomes through compassionate care by our Care Teams.

Evidence-based medicine and clinical support tools help guide decision making (our Providers use the latest health care practices to treat patients).

Chiricahua supports a culture of quality health care and looks for opportunities for quality improvement

Patients actively participating in the decision-making process and offering feedback through our patient satisfaction surveys, comment cards and/or our Compliance Hotline.

Patients are encouraged to become a team member to manage their care.



Patients also have access to Integrated Behavioral Health professionals as well as Registered Dietitians to assist with their quality of care and quality of life.

Information technology is utilized appropriately to support optimal care, performance measurement, patient education, and enhanced communication (Electronic Health Record).

Care Coordination and Care Management to assist patients in overcoming barriers (ie. Transportation assistance, medication assistance and lack of resources).

As head of the CCHCI Pediatric Center on 15th Street she says intervening early in children's lives ensures their best chance for a healthy future. "I have focused my career on those children with the least access to quality medical care," she is quoted as saying on the CCHCI website. Dr. Melk says Douglas has its strengths but it also has some things it can definitely improve on. "As a pediatrician in this community... I think that one of our challenges is obesity in children. Unfortunately, a child who starts out overweight or obese, the likelihood of that child to continue on that path to an adult is very high." One of things Dr. Melk says she tries to do is educate families about healthy nutrition and healthy eating habits especially at a young age. "If we get them started when they are young they are more likely to continue those healthier habits when they are young adults," she said.

Dr. Melk said she is also trying to promote early literacy and education. "We are in the process of renovating a school into an early childhood learning center of excellence that is going to focus on prevention visits," she said. "We are hoping to open in March." At the new facility on 15th Street and A Avenue, Dr. Melk states the current Pediatric. Center of Excellence on 15th

Street is not meeting the demands of the community. “We never imagined that we would need more space but we actually do,” she said. “This building will focus on prevention visits or well child care for children from birth to 11-years. Another special group of children that will also be treated there are those with adolescents with chronic conditions... like diabetes, asthma, down syndrome or epilepsy ... things that parents may have to see a lot of specialists for ... It’s going to be all prevention focused.” Dr. Melk believes that in order make a difference in somebody’s life you have to have a relationship with them and at the Pediatric Center of Excellence patients are encouraged to select a primary care doctor that will see their child 80 percent of the time.

“We have developed patient care teams here,” she said. “Our teams are very aware and we communicate well with each other so we know each other’s patients.” When Dr. Melk initially joined CCHCI she was the third pediatrician to come to Douglas as part of CCHCI and now there is a group of 16 in Cochise County, seven of which are located in Douglas. “It’s basically because of the demand,” she said. “It’s obvious there’s a need; there’s some children that we still are not able to reach but we are getting into communities we never were before.” Dr. Melk says she is starting to see a change now where families are seeing the importance of prevention visits. “When we first came it was very much acute care, they would only come if they were sick,” she said. “Now we have families coming in for their well child checks and they are coming in for dental as well which we have integrated into the building so they can come get their vaccines, blood checks and dental all in one day.”

Dr. Melk stated that healing and health care doesn’t necessarily have to happen at the Pediatric Center of Excellence. “It can happen by going out and

talking to the high school students or it can happen by making relationships with other important service entities like the health department or other people who are also involved in the healthcare of this community.” Just recently CCHCI developed a program with the Douglas Unified School District where students interested in the healthcare profession can shadow the staff at CCHCI for 72 hours. In addition to her responsibilities to her patients in Douglas Dr. Melk is the Chief Medical Officer for the Rosa Vera Fund (www.rosaverafund.org) a nonprofit organization which provides medical and social interventions for children in Bolivia. “We want healthy children to become healthy productive, working adults,” she said.

The 2021 Community Star Selection Committee will review and evaluate nominations, making recommendations for which stories to include in this year’s book and other NRHD activities based on the following merits. Please review these and select all that apply to your nominee.

Cultivates a vital, innovative rural health landscape and infrastructure. ,
Develops leadership capacity to grow rural population health and health equity. , Builds capacity for rural data-driven program planning and decision making. , Contributes to rural health innovation, education, collaboration, and communication.

Describe in as much detail as possible, examples of your nominee’s work and accomplishments that correspond with your selections to the question above.

Dr. Darlene R. Melk is a Pediatrician in Douglas, AZ with special training and skill in diagnosing, preventing, and treating childhood illnesses. As a Pediatrician, Darlene R. Melk, MD performs medical diagnosis and treatment of diseases and conditions affecting young people from infants to teenagers.

Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc. (CCHCI) is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that was



founded in 1996 to provide medical services for the residents of Cochise County, Arizona. Cochise County

stretches for 6,163 square miles across primarily a high desert landscape with 100 miles of border between

Arizona and Mexico. This rural county is roughly the size of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined, with

a much lower population density. While 4,630,000 people reside in those two states, Cochise County has

126,770 residents.⁴ Approximately 25% of children under age 18 in the county live below the federal poverty

level, higher than the national average of 20%. This rate is substantially higher in some of the communities

that CCHCI serves, like Douglas where the rate is 38%. The population is 50% non-Hispanic White and 35%

Hispanic. Twenty-two percent of the population are children.⁵

CCHCI provides more care to more community members than ever before due to Dr. Melk's vision and leadership capacity. She has created a vibrant, skilled and engaged workforce, overcoming a significant challenge for rural healthcare

providers; and, has developed powerful and respectful partnerships with community agencies and

leaders.

I can confirm that the individual or organization is making a difference in rural

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through collaboration, education, innovation, and communication, and is located, working, or volunteering in a designated rural area.

Yes

I can confirm that I have notified the nominee of their nomination, and the nomination will be accepted.

Yes

How did you learn about the 2021 Community Star Recognition Program?

Email

Have Questions? Contact:

powerofrural.org | nosorh.org | bcorsaro@powerofrural.org