

Remarks
Gloria Guard
2009 Public Health Recognition Award for organizational leadership
College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Section on Public Health and Preventive Medicine
May 5, 2009

On behalf of People's Emergency Center I want to express our deep appreciation to the Section on Public Health and Preventive Medicine of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia for the 2009 Public Health Recognition Award for organizational leadership. It's an honor to be recognized for our work and in particular alongside Mayor Michael Nutter.

For those of you who don't know us, I'd like to say a few words about our organization.

PEC began in 1972 as a volunteer effort providing weekend meals and shelter to homeless families in a church basement. We had an annual operating budget of \$12,000 back then. Today, our staff of 85 and more than 100 volunteers provides single-parent families health care and education, job and job readiness training, parenting education, drug and alcohol counseling, teen programs, and afterschool and summer programs for children. We've helped over 8,000 families since our inception.

And our community development corporation has generated more than \$40 million of investment to convert vacant buildings and trash-strewn lots into mixed-income housing, community gardens, playgrounds, parks, and attractive commercial corridors.

As we know, where and how someone lives can hinder or contribute to good health. Homeless people have a higher incidence than the general population of almost all health problems, particularly malnutrition, tuberculosis, hypertension, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, asthma, and bronchitis. They are far more likely to fall victim to infections, violence, and parasites.

We've developed a philosophy at PEC that emphasizes making life healthier, in the broadest sense of the word.. We agree with Benjamin Franklin that "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." This brings us to several important partners and programs for which we are, in part, being recognized this evening.

PEC was the first shelter in Philadelphia to have a special health program for homeless children, with pediatricians from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia under the guidance of Dr. Donald Schwarz, who is of course now deputy mayor and health commissioner of Philadelphia.

Through its *Homeless Healthcare Initiative*, doctors from Children's Hospital come to PEC to provide nutrition and child development workshops, on-site health screenings and camp physicals, and to treat medical problems. Last year more than 60 children received care under this program and monthly workshops were held for our mothers. The care that is provided treats today's problems and the workshops help prevent tomorrow's.

Then, when the Public Health Management Corporation, which all of us know as PHMC, started a federal health care for the homeless program, we were quick to partner with them.

PHMC's *Health Care for the Homeless Project* provides on-site health assessment and nursing evaluation for our homeless mothers and children, vaccinates children, offers monthly gynecological services to our mothers and teens, and provides preventive health care education. Last year, this partnership served 280 adults and children. Kristen Walker, the PHMC nurse, has become a trusted member of the PEC family, and our mothers rely on her immensely. And the results are clear, since we have seen a decline in emergency room visits by our clients as a result of this initiative. I've been known to use the nurse too!

And I think it's important to note that these two terrific programs are provided at no cost to PEC or our clients. I'd like to ask Dr. Richard Cohen, Elaine Fox, Sandy Orlin from PHMC and Dr. Steven Altschuler, Melissa Berrios and Karen Hudson from CHOP who are here with us tonight to stand and be recognized for your truly invaluable service. *(Gloria leads applause.)*

As I've said, when it comes to health care, we place a premium on prevention at PEC. That's why we also have two huge playgrounds and outstanding afterschool and summer programs for our children and teen clients and why we have instituted healthy-living monthly educational programs in such areas as smoking, exercise, nutrition, and hand-washing.

When we look at our housing and community development efforts, we also have health in mind. Whether its renewing Saunders Park, developing playgrounds, or making sure our housing is LEED certified, we pay attention to the environment so that we and our neighbors can live healthier lives. These efforts, along with the partnerships we have been fortunate to form with so many great organizations, including CHOP and PHMC, offer genuine hope for the future for homeless families.

Let me again thank you for this recognition. It is truly an outstanding honor for which we are very grateful. Thank you all for coming tonight.