



Reimagining Health Care at Its Roots

BY CORNELIUS D. PITTS, PHARMD

When we look across the health care landscape and its needs, we see brokenness, shards, and enormous pockets of need among community members and health systems alike. This has never been made clearer than in what we've witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Miriam Medical Clinics is a nonprofit, primary health center with the chief mission of providing health access to all who seek it. This means that compassion, community, and need are at the forefront of our health care model. Hearing patients' stories shapes the paradigm of establishing trust, connection, and relationship with those we serve. In this, we are constantly trying to reimagine the future of health care.

Recently, Miriam Medical Clinics played a key role in distribution of mass COVID-19 vaccinations in Philadelphia. This has been an all-volunteer effort. During this effort, we have seen two things: there is a mass of humanity eager to be vaccinated, and there has been a mass of health care professionals eager to vaccinate. Vaccine "eagerness" exists on both sides of the equation. So the question is, are we seeing the birth of a movement or the reinvigoration of what was already there? I submit that it is both, but the "magic" and "goodness" that already exist in our community are real. Channeling that energy in organized and structured ways is now our challenge, and if our community meets

this challenge, intentionally and mindfully, a new era of health care will begin.

The "army" of volunteer health professionals and laypeople is evidence that the will to provide comprehensive and trusted health care already exists. We must dare to imagine a future where this strength is harnessed to create connectedness and relationships with those needing care so that whole communities are not only encouraged to thrive but to explode with vibrancy. This begins at the grassroots, community health clinic level, where day-to-day health care takes place. While research, academia, and hospitals remain absolutely necessary, it is in the neighborhoods where basic trust and relationships need to be garnered in order to bring community members into their doctor's office. We have seen this at Miriam Medical Clinics. We have also learned that this trust and the relationships and evident compassion "get vaccines into arms."

We also envision a future in health care where the patient is the center and leader of the health care team. Only patients can tell their own story. It is only this type of collaboration and connectedness that will lead us into a reimagined health care landscape. This year has brought us to the brink of that reality. Compassion will keep us there. ■



Dr. Cornelius Pitts serves at Miriam Medical Clinics and teaches at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy as well as Temple University's Lewis Katz School of Medicine.



Miriam Medical Clinics hosts Trauma Conference. PHOTO CREDIT: PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. CORNELIUS PITTS.