



CHAMPIONS OF HEALTH CARE

**By Joel Abrams, President and CEO
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Welcome to our Dorchester House monthly column. My colleagues and I at “Dot House” - as we are often and affectionately called - will be writing this column with the goal of bringing you news and information on subjects that affect your health and the health of our community. At Dot House, we have clinicians, public health professionals, youth workers, and other staff who are committed to serving our community. So we will use this space to offer our perspectives on issues that are important to you, to let you know what Dorchester House is doing to address health needs, and to ask you to let us know what we could do to make things better.

We all have reasons for visiting a health care professional. We may seek care for our annual checkup, a minor problem, or something more serious. And we probably have similar experiences. After checking in and getting a quick once-over by a medical assistant, we spend quality time with our caregiver and then we are dressed and out the door - perhaps with some follow-up care needed. Terrific, but we may ask ourselves, “Is that what my doctor does all day?” Often, the answer is “no”. In fact, these same medical professionals whom we visit in the exam room, may at other times be teaching future health professionals, leading research studies or developing and leading programs to improve health outcomes, often on their own time and without the credit they deserve. At Dorchester House, we have come to think of these clinical leaders and other professionals as our “champions” and I would like to take this opportunity to sing the praises of just a few of our many Dot House champions.

Pediatrician Dr. Giusy Romano-Clarke was concerned that so many of her patients, including toddlers, were presenting with poor oral health. She found funding and launched “Healthy Teeth for Tots” to train pediatricians to incorporate oral health screenings into the health visit. This program is now a national model. Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Emily Feinberg led a project to develop a guide in the electronic medical record. This helps the practitioners ask new mothers, during their babies’ well visits, questions about maternal depression. Dr. Dana Rubin, a pediatric psychiatrist, in response to the Rosie D. v. Romney court decision, won a grant to develop a better way to integrate behavioral health evaluation into children’s primary care.

Our Nutritionist, Mary Lynch, goes well beyond counseling patients on their diets. She teaches nutritional cooking classes to teens in our after-school program, had them plant a vegetable garden, and even has them learning dance routines. And she organized a weekly farmers market to bring locally grown, organic produce to our neighborhood.

And we have champions in Adult Medicine as well. Dr. Julita Mir leads our efforts to improve prevention and treatment of chronic illnesses. When the CDC issued new guidelines regarding AIDS/HIV, she jumped at the challenge, and now Dorchester House (along with our partner Codman Square Health Center) is the first in the state to incorporate rapid testing for HIV in primary care. Dr. Katie Harris is developing expanded programs for our elderly patients, including house-calls to home-bound patients and those in nursing homes. And Dr. Ivy Brackup has developed and led a comprehensive support group program for diabetic patients. The group meets weekly for exercise, nutrition and other health information in order to stay healthy and out of the hospital.

All of us at Dorchester House want to recognize the leadership and dedication shown by our clinicians, and acknowledge that there are health care professionals everywhere serving their communities, working to produce better health outcomes for all of us.

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