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A bit of HCN history

On Thanksgiving Day in 1960, CBS News aired “Harvest of Shame,” a documentary narrated by Edward R. Murrow. Much of it was filmed in Florida, with some scenes occurring in Collier County. It told the grim story of migrant workers living from hand-to-mouth, barely able to feed their children as they harvested a bounty of fruit and produce for the best fed nation on earth. They had no health care, no possessions except for the clothes on their back, no safety net and little hope of improving their lives.

A remark made by a landowner in the documentary encapsulated their plight: “We used to own our slaves; now we rent them.”

Certainly these imagines came to mind time and again as community leaders in Collier County pondered what could be done, and how, to provide basic health care not only for the area’s migrant workers but for all underserved citizens of Southwest Florida. By the mid-1970s, their ideas took form and by 1977, Collier Health Services was up and running.

It wasn’t much in the beginning — just temporary office space in the Collier County Health Department and then two stationary trailers in Immokalee — but it was definitely the first step in addressing this Harvest of Shame.

Despite its meager facilities, CHS provided excellent care to a diverse population. As word spread, so too did its patient base and volume. By 1993, when it was able to build its first permanent facility, The Marion E. Fether Medical Center in Immokalee, CHS was providing care to more than 15,000 patients.

Recognition by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations was achieved a few years later and renewals continues to this day, while a second phase of growth was completed in 1996 with the establishment of a pediatric network of offices serving Marco Island to Immokalee.

In 1999, the Immokalee Family Care Center opened, the first of several new facilities built to serve both children and adults including the Family Care Naples East Center / Horizons Primary Care (2003), renamed the Mike Davis Medical Center in 2008.

Recognizing the fact that not all families could travel to its facilities, HCN introduced the first mobile pediatric facility in Collier County in 2004 to serve children’s dental and medical needs. Four years later, the company opened the 12-chair Countryside Dental Center in East Naples.

While all of this growth was occurring, HCN continued to further its reputation and shore up its future by establishing The Collier Health Services Foundation (now the Healthcare Network Foundation) and by achieving accreditation by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.

CHS was renamed Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida in 2012 and is positioned to grow well into the future with new facilities to build, staff to be added and practice areas to be broadened.

As CEO Mike Ellis affirms, "We intend to become the best, most comprehensive and most affordable health-care provider for every resident of Southwest Florida." ;

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