

Taking it to the streets

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the ever changing health care environment has resulted in the development of new ways to reach people in communities served by OSF HealthCare across Illinois and the UP of Michigan.

In the Peoria area, OSF partnered with local churches and social service agencies through the Faith Community Nurse team with a goal of reaching patients where they are. This has led to the development of the OSF Street Medicine program which is directly addressing disparities in care.

Dr. Mary Stapel, medical director for community care at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, says there are three primary areas of need they are seeing:

“Addiction, mental health and wound care, by far, those are the things that we're seeing the most. These were patients that otherwise really were not accessing care at all, unless it was going to the ER, which really isn't the ideal way that we want them to be accessing care.”

Dr. Stapel says the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed more needs and vulnerabilities of those served by the Street Medicine program. The team recently received a new shuttle which will help expand care for more unsheltered individuals and deliver food, medical care, clothes, blankets and toiletries.

Faith Community Nurse Randall McClallen is one of those working directly in the neighborhoods. “We do a lot of referrals to medical providers, mental health providers, services for food, services for housing, services for harm reduction. So hopefully that will have a lasting impact.”

There are other initiatives spearheaded by OSF to bring access to care, food, and other necessities into local neighborhoods, including community gardens, which help address food deserts and other social determinants of health. In Peoria, the harvest from two Gardens of Hope amounted to more than 12,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables given to those living in the adjacent neighborhoods, to local food banks, and to community agencies.