

Testimony Supporting Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care

Karen Klein, MSN, APRN

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I am a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner at the Fair Haven Community Health Center, a federally qualified health center in New Haven, that provides primary care, including preventive and supportive services to adolescents and their families. We provide primary health care services across the lifespan to more than 14,000 patients who consider us their medical home. Eighty six percent of our patients are minority, 35% have no insurance and 95% live below 200% of the federal poverty level.

I am submitting written testimony in support of comprehensive adolescent health care and the need to incorporate a developmental approach to adolescent services. Last Spring, President Obama created an Office of Adolescent Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. This Office was established to oversee programs that provide access to medically accurate information, that are responsive to the developmental needs of youth, and that link youth to confidential clinical services. This is the first time that youth development has been integrated with primary health care services at the federal level.

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by morbidity and mortality that is largely preventable. The United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified several risk behaviors that are responsible for the greatest morbidity and mortality among adolescents. These include inadequate physical activity and nutrition, sexual behavior that may lead to unintended pregnancy or infection, substance use and abuse and behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence. According to the 2005 Connecticut School Health Survey, behaviors related to unintentional injury and violence, obesity and depression are most common among Connecticut youth who identify themselves as minorities. A Child Trends study published in May, 2009 in the Journal of Adolescent Health, reported that one in five teens say that most of their friends are in "unhealthy" relationships without love, trust, respect and honesty.

Our own Youth Advisory Group, which is made up of young people who use our school based health center and main clinical services, echo these concerns. These young people help us to plan our school-based health center programs and to create a more youth-friendly environment in all of our clinical settings. They consistently set priorities around issues of obesity and nutrition, stress and depression, healthy sexuality, relationship issues, including pregnancy prevention, domestic violence, suicide prevention, and how to cope with a parent who has a substance abuse issue or violent temper. Their number one concern in seeking health care services is a sense of privacy and confidentiality.

At our health center, we build relationships with young people and their families and help them to identify and reflect upon their life and to imagine a new future for themselves. We help young people to reach their developmental outcomes by providing consistent, caring support, as well as accurate information, and opportunities to make informed choices about their health and well-being. We appreciate the funding that we receive to provide primary care and we propose greater attention and support for an integrated youth development approach to comprehensive services for youth