



## Rooted in activism... then, now and always

Country Doctor Community Health Centers has lived and breathed activism from the very beginning. Our clinics' founders were leaders of the civil rights and anti-war movements in Seattle. They protested the Vietnam War and clashed with police.

***They did not back down when the powers that be branded them as radicals.***

The Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party founded Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center in the Central District in 1970. Country Doctor Community Clinic opened the following year in Capitol Hill. Only one of the five Seattle Liberation Front protesters who led the charge for Country Doctor had any medical training; Gino Gianola was a medic in the Vietnam War. After a philosophy professor's teach-in at the University of Washington in 1969, he and other activists went door to door, asking what change would do the most to empower the community.

***They heard the same thing over and over again: Their community wanted health care.***

They held community meetings and opened Country Doctor Community Clinic in an abandoned firehouse in 1971. At first, all the providers and helpers were volunteers who saw patients in the evenings.

Both Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor got help from Dr. John Green, a University of Washington surgeon who separately gave both clinics the equipment and supplies they would need to get up and running.

Both clinics began by treating the community's most vulnerable patients. Carolyn Downs focused on nutritional needs of low-income children in elementary schools, sickle cell screening and treatment, and chronic disease management.

In the 1980s, Country Doctor became one of the first clinics in Seattle to welcome new immigrants, and the young clinic — already well-known for opening its doors to everyone — found itself at the epicenter of a devastating unknown disease soon to be known as AIDS.

The clinics became part of the same organization, Country Doctor Community Health Centers, in 1988. Ever since, Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor have continued to take action, day in and day out, providing compassionate and innovative health care to those who need it most.

**“Our legacy is empowerment. We could tell the community: If you can change your own health, you can change anything.”**

— Gino Gianola, *Country Doctor co-founder*

# Dear friends,

Activism is a powerful thing. It begins with people seeing the need for change and **taking action** to make things happen. Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor were both founded by activists who worked together to set up free clinics for folks who weren't getting the care that we all need to lead healthy, productive lives.

I'm proud of our roots in activism. It's the reason I took action, myself, almost 10 years ago now, when I joined Board of Directors here at Country Doctor Community Health Centers.

**I'm proud of how we walk the walk for health care as a human right.**

Everyone should have health care. It's not something that should depend on where you work, where you live, what race you are, or anything.

Everyone should be treated with respect and compassion when they go to the doctor, which is exactly what I experienced the first time I walked into Country Doctor many years ago.

I was sick and had just been laid off from work. When I went in for my first visit, I figured they'd ask me about my insurance right off the bat, but they didn't. They asked me how I was feeling. Then they got to figuring out how they could help me feel better.

**They cared more about caring for me than how I would pay for my care.** It was so simple, yet it felt like such a novel approach to me. I was impressed. I still am, because this is the same approach we take every day with everyone who comes to our clinics.

I'm proud to serve on a patient-centered board that reflects the diversity of the community we serve — especially now, amidst a pandemic that's taking a harsher toll on low-income people and communities of color.

I'm proud of the kindness and fierce commitment to justice that our staff shows every day, whether they're caring for patients on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic or taking to the streets, carrying on our longstanding tradition of activism.

I'm proud and humbled by the support that Country Doctor, Carolyn Downs, our After Hours Clinic, and Dental Clinic receive from supporters like you, who fuel our fight for equity and justice through community health.

Thank you. Stay safe. And stay healthy.



**Rik Wyman**  
Chairman, Board of Directors  
Country Doctor Community Health Centers

# Joining the march(es) for Black lives

True to our history in activism, staff members from each of our clinics joined thousands of protesters this summer, showing our solidarity with the **Black Lives Matter** movement and uprisings for racial justice in the wake of George Floyd's death at the hands of police in Minneapolis.

We turned out for Seattle's health care community March for Justice rally against racism and police brutality. We encouraged staff to take part in the general strike and silent march for Black Lives, as well as King County Equity Now's Freedom March and Celebration on Juneteenth, and the Umoja Parade March & Day of Unity for Black Lives.

We've commemorated Juneteenth for many years, led by our staff at Carolyn Downs, and with support from our board, which treated employees to lunch this year from June Baby, a local Black-owned restaurant. Staff hosted an informational table at this year's Umoja Parade March & Day of Unity.

We took to the streets, and we also dug deep internally as a staff. In early August, we came together for all-staff diversity and equity dialogue sessions led by Elmer Dixon, a founding member of the Seattle Black Panther Party and longtime champion of our clinics.



# Buoyed as we rise to the challenge(s)

## Community rallies around our clinics, providers and patients as we navigate the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism

Our community has amazed us time and time again over the past several months, showing up in countless ways, with support that has lifted us up during one of the heaviest times in our history.

From donated masks, to generous gifts from individuals and foundations, the tremendous support we've received has helped us immensely in responding to this pandemic. This support gave us the **agility** to innovate quickly, and the **resilience** to build for the future in continuing our deep commitment to our **roots** in providing high-quality care to those marginalized from the mainstream medical system.

In early spring when the coronavirus surged from outbreak to pandemic, Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor quickly pivoted to telemedicine — faster than any community health center in the state. By providing the vast majority of our services by phone or videoconference, we gave our patients access to care from their homes and reduced the risk of spreading the virus.

### Shoring up support for unsheltered patients

Not all of our patients have homes, so our **Healthcare for the Homeless** team stepped up outreach and services to more tiny house villages run by Low Income Housing Institute. In addition to providing on-site care and information about ways to protect themselves from the coronavirus, we distributed reusable cloth masks, hand-stitched and donated in droves by community supporters.



### Counseling patients through a behavioral health crisis

Like many healthcare providers, our clinics have seen a rise in patients experiencing severe anxiety, depression, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts. Our quick transition to telehealth helped us provide uninterrupted counseling. Some providers say patients seemed more willing to talk about their struggles because they feel less vulnerable talking by phone than in person.

Meeting with patients by phone and video enabled us to reach new patients more easily, since visits by phone or video don't require patients to arrange for childcare or get transportation to our clinics. Our behavioral health teams are working on ways to reach patients who have limited or no access to a phone or computer.

### Supporting our staff with job security

Since the beginning of the pandemic, our management team has fought hard to ensure that no one in our clinics was furloughed. We redeployed dental assistants to help us screen patients who came in for care that could only be provided in person. Other members of our dental team helped out in our call center, filling in for employees who took family leave to care for children home from school and elders who needed care.

"This was super amazing," says Creseta Simmons, Nurse Manager and Nurse Practitioner at our After Hours Clinic. "The security this provided allowed us to focus more on our patients and less on our own survival."

## Confronting COVID's disproportionate impact on low-income communities of color

Many people experiencing homelessness and living in poverty — especially in Black, Indigenous, and communities of color — suffer higher rates of underlying and chronic health conditions, which makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19.

We've been addressing healthcare disparities like the ones this pandemic has exposed since the very beginning. It's what fueled our founders to establish Carolyn Downs, Country Doctor, and later our After Hours Clinic and Dental Clinic. It's what keeps us going today and committed to doing the work for decades to come, improving access to high-quality care to who need it most.

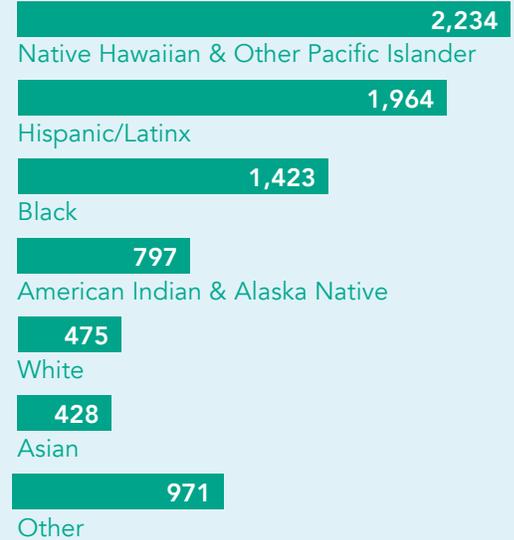
*"IT'S AN ONGOING NATIONAL TRAGEDY THAT COMMUNITIES OF COLOR REMAIN AT INCREASED RISK FOR A WIDE RANGE OF ADVERSE HEALTH OUTCOMES RELATED TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH. AND COVID-19 IS NO EXCEPTION."*

**Dr. Jeff Duchin**, Health Officer for Public Health – Seattle & King County, *Public Health Insider*

### A disproportionate toll

COVID-19 is hitting communities of color significantly harder than the white population.

*Age-adjusted rate of confirmed cases in King County per 100,000 residents*



*Source: COVID-19 cases among King County, WA residents by race and ethnicity, Public Health – Seattle & King County as of September 24, 2020*

## Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU for all the support!

There aren't enough pages in this newsletter to thank the dozens and dozens of people and partners who have supported us through these incredibly challenging times. Please join us in thanking just a few.

**Thank you to more restaurants than we have room to list here** that donated delicious food to our staff, even when they hit hard and hurting financially while closed to the public.

**Thank you everyone who donated masks**, which helped our unsheltered patients stay safe.

**Thank you to the many generous individuals and foundations** that have donated money to support our mission since the pandemic began.

**Thank you for the outpouring of thank-you cards.** (Yes, we are so grateful that we are thanking you for thanking us!)



*Thank you to celebrity champions like Ben Gibbard, Death Cab for Cutie's lead singer and guitarist, who plugged Country Doctor in a concert live-streamed from his home on Capitol Hill.*

## PROVIDER Q&A

# Meet Creseta Simmons

**Name:** Creseta Simmons (she/her)

**Job Title:** Clinical Nurse Manager/Nurse Practitioner, After Hours Clinic

**Credentials:** AGNP-C (Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner), DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice), MN (Master's of Nursing)

**Joined After Hours Clinic:** February 2017

### What was your first job in health care?

I started out as a medical assistant at Group Health, floating wherever they needed me for about two years, then landed in the urology department, where I worked while pursuing the prerequisites I needed to get into an undergraduate nursing program.

### What was your first job in nursing?

I worked as a labor and delivery nurse at Swedish for six years after earning my nursing degree. I also received certification as a labor and delivery nurse during my time there.

### What motivated you to pursue each of your many degrees in nursing?

I went to medical assistant school right after high school, got a 4.0, and picked things up really quickly. But during the first few years of my career, someone I worked with would always remind me that I was just a medical assistant. A lot of my professors saw potential in me, how I'd go above and beyond, and they encouraged me to go to nursing school. Once I got my nursing degree, I knew I wanted to go further. At each level, I felt like I could do more. I could make those decisions about patient care.

### What drew you to Country Doctor Community Health Centers?

During my years as a labor and delivery nurse, I noticed a lot of disparities based on access to health care, resources, family dynamics, and other social determinants. I always found myself gravitating toward the patients whose health and wellbeing suffered because of those disparities. I went back to school for my masters and doctorate degree concurrently while working part-time as a nurse at the After Hours Clinic. Working after-hours gave me the flexibility I needed to finish my degrees. I also continued to do some per diem work in Labor and delivery as time permitted. In addition to furthering my education, graduate school also sparked my interest in teaching, so I started working as a teaching assistant at University of Washington's nursing school while earning my master's and doctorate.

### What do you like most about your job?

The patients. I love taking care of people the world's given up on. They're the people who appreciate your care the most. Our homeless patients, for example, they come in and are looking for just that moment of someone actually focusing on them. There's something about that that really drives me. It makes me feel like I'm doing a little bit of God's work. I'm taking care of my fellow neighbor. I'm taking care of those without. It's a lot harder to take care of someone who's privileged than someone who's not.

## What is your management style?

I don't like hierarchy. I think one of my best attributes is that I treat everyone as equals. Within our team, we work so well together. From the lab tech to the providers, everyone has mutual respect for one another. We've built an environment where we don't focus on titles or power dynamics — just giving great care, entering every patient's room without judgment, and bringing out the best in one another.

## What are you most looking forward to about the After Hours Clinic's move to Carolyn Downs this fall?

I think I'm most excited about coming home. Country Doctor Community Health Centers is such a wonderful organization. We do amazing work, and a lot of people don't associate the After Hours Clinic with Country Doctor and Carolyn Downs, because we've been located at Swedish all these years. Being at Carolyn Downs will definitely give us a sense of pride. Yes, we're home. We're where we should be.



# The After Hours Clinic is moving

to our Carolyn Downs clinic

**After nearly seven years at Swedish Medical Center, our After Hours Clinic is moving to Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center this fall. Our patients will benefit from:**

- ✦ Greater access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction
- ✦ Expanded PreP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) treatment for patients at high risk of HIV
- ✦ Integration of primary health care for individuals without a medical home

**Our After Hours Clinic hours will remain open seven days a week for non-emergency walk-in care to anyone who needs it. No appointment necessary.**

Monday – Friday: 6 pm - 9 pm

Saturday – Sunday: 11 am - 5 pm



COUNTRY DOCTOR  
COMMUNITY CLINIC



CAROLYN DOWNS  
FAMILY MEDICAL CENTER



AFTER HOURS  
CLINIC

COUNTRY DOCTOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

## FIGHTING FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE THROUGH COMMUNITY HEALTH

COUNTRY DOCTOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS' clinics serve all patients with compassionate, comprehensive care, regardless of their ability to pay. As a nonprofit healthcare provider, we provide a warm and welcoming healthcare home to members of our community who live at disproportionately higher risk of chronic and life-threatening illness due to racism, discrimination and other systems of oppression. We treat each person's unique medical, mental health, and dental needs in a safe and supportive environment.

[cdhc.org](http://cdhc.org)