

PLANTING SEEDS OF HEALTH IN YOLO COUNTY

HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SUCCESS STORY



What you eat and what you drink are important to Dr. Barry Chang, dental director at CommuniCare Health Centers in Yolo County.

“Oral health is directly related to nutrition. I see patients daily coming into the clinic with a problem, be it a toothache or an illness. I don’t think some of them fully understand the impact of healthy eating on their health. I believe there’s an urgent need to raise this issue and bring this awareness to my community.”

Dr. Chang saw the Champion Provider Fellowship as the perfect opportunity to launch his advocacy for his patients’ nutrition and dental health. As a member of the Yolo County Oral Health Advisory Committee, Dr. Chang credits Rebecca Tryon, manager of the Healthy Communities Initiative of the Yolo County Health Department, for fostering a powerful partnership focused on reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, creating access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and educating the community about better nutrition. Through this, they were able to establish May as “Rethink Your Drink Month” in Yolo County, execute an awareness ad campaign and distribute promotional materials countywide.

Working with CommuniCare, Dr. Chang helped establish a Food Is Medicine initiative team that integrates fruit and vegetable access, and skills-based education into the clinical setting. Food Is Medicine initiatives demonstrate how growing, preparing, and eating healthy food is foundational to physical and mental health. The garden and outdoor classroom at the Woodland Health Center annually yields 2,000 pounds of produce distributed free-of-charge to patients along with recipes and nutrition information in clinic waiting rooms.

“The clinic garden is more than just a source of nutritious foods, it’s a way to inspire, educate and invite people to live healthier lives and build healthier communities.”

Dr. Barry Chang, Yolo County, Dentist

“The garden is near and dear to my heart. There were changes that had to be implemented and many pieces to the puzzle. Community health centers aren’t typically in the business of farming! But we thought outside the box and hired a farmer with decades of experience, so now we have a beautiful garden that demonstrates how important healthy food is to overall health. We are producing top-quality vegetables to share with patients who otherwise might lack access to these items,” said Dr. Chang. “We had support from CommuniCare’s leadership team and Board of Directors, which really believed in the mission of the garden, donations from community members and local businesses, grant support, and expertise from local researchers, the agricultural and restaurant industries, the City of Woodland, and beyond.”

According to Dr. Chang, the garden is a catalyst for bringing his patients, fellow providers and members of the community together to boost nutrition. “The clinic garden is more than just a source of nutritious foods, it’s a way to inspire, educate and invite people to live healthier lives and build healthier communities.”

The Champion Provider Fellowship empowers, trains and supports doctors and dentists to use their expertise and respected voices to improve the health of communities through policy, systems and environmental changes.

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