

## POLK FIT, FRESH AND FRIENDLY

### Foothills Health Network - A Wellness Resource for Polk County

By Michele O.Trofatter, MPH

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Imagine you have relocated to a new community, a new county, a new state, and don't have health insurance but need medical care for chronic conditions. This all too familiar story describes Miesha Swadley's situation after her family moved to Polk County recently. Miesha, who has Type 2 diabetes, has also been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Although Miesha and her husband have always been employed and hard-working contributors to the community they lived in, they recently had to get disability benefits and, for the first time in their lives, were not able to afford the medical care they needed. Initially, Miesha tried to get help by purchasing insurance through the Marketplace; however, she quickly found out that there were no local providers who accepted the plan she could afford. Or if she was able to find a provider, she could not afford her part under patient responsibility. Fortunately, she sought care from Blue Ridge Polk Health Center where she was referred to case management services available through Foothills Health Network.

Foothills Health Network\* (FHN) is a relatively new entity in Polk County whose mission is to create a healthier Polk County by increasing access to coordinated, quality care and cultivating community engagement. FHN represents a collaborative effort of numerous healthcare and social service organizations in Polk County including St. Luke's Hospital, The Free Clinics, Blue Ridge Community Health Services, and Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly, among others, that envision a healthy community with engaged citizens, community organizations, and collaborative healthcare partners.

Currently, uninsured patients in Polk County, like Miesha, can be referred to a case manager for placement into primary care, specialty care, and/or prescription assistance based on needs and eligibility. Once Miesha met with the case manager and her eligibility was approved, she was able to receive all of her medications to treat her chronic medical conditions free of charge. Another benefit of the services provided by FHN allows Miesha to pick up her monthly prescriptions from The Free Clinics locally and conveniently at St. Luke's Hospital rather than having to drive to Hendersonville.

Additionally, any patient, regardless of insurance status or Free Clinics Eligibility, can be referred to a Diabetes Self-Management Education Program and a Certified Diabetes Educator free of charge. Since Miesha is a Type 2 diabetic, she has been referred for the appropriate services and programs. Miesha and her family are "extremely grateful for the care, concern,

and respect” they have received from FHN. She says, “If not for FHN, my family would be in desperate straits and would probably have to choose to not get medical care or medication.”

FHN extends a heartfelt thank you to Miesha and her family for sharing their story. Miesha’s success story is a testament to the power of the Network. We look forward to working with our partners to create new and additional avenues of quality care for everyone in our community.

Other exciting initiatives are being developed and implemented by Foothills Health Network. By the end of 2016, FHN will also provide a Diabetes Prevention Program using CDC-developed curriculum to the pre-diabetes, at-risk population in Polk County. This 16-week program will also be available free of charge, regardless of insurance status.

FHN is also partnering with the local health coalition, Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) to implement new communication strategies in Polk County. Using an initiative known as Hear2Help, FHN and PF3 aim to connect residents with available resources, as well as obtain valuable resident input to create an avenue of two-way communication about health and wellness in Polk County. Look for more in-depth information as the program is rolled out at the end of the year.

Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) is a group of 80+ community members, leaders and health professionals, all working together to plan and implement effective strategies to promote wellness in our community. We welcome any individual who is interested in joining us to make our community a healthier place for all. For more information and a list of our 2016 meeting dates, please visit our website at [www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org](http://www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org).

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