



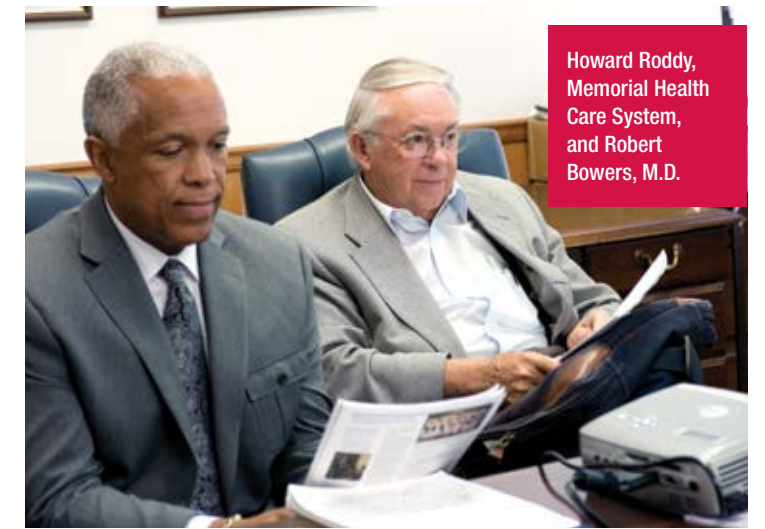
(l to r) Polly Ryan, Memorial North Shore and Westside Health Centers; Sharon Stewart, Volunteers in Medicine; Tammy Burke, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department; William McInnis, Dodson Avenue and Southside Community Health Centers; Rae Young Bond, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society and Medical Foundation of Chattanooga

The program is specifically designed for those who have fallen between the cracks: people with low-income jobs who cannot afford health coverage, but make too much to qualify for programs like TennCare. Since its inception, Project Access has donated over \$112 million in health care to uninsured Hamilton County residents, and over 700 volunteer physicians currently participate.

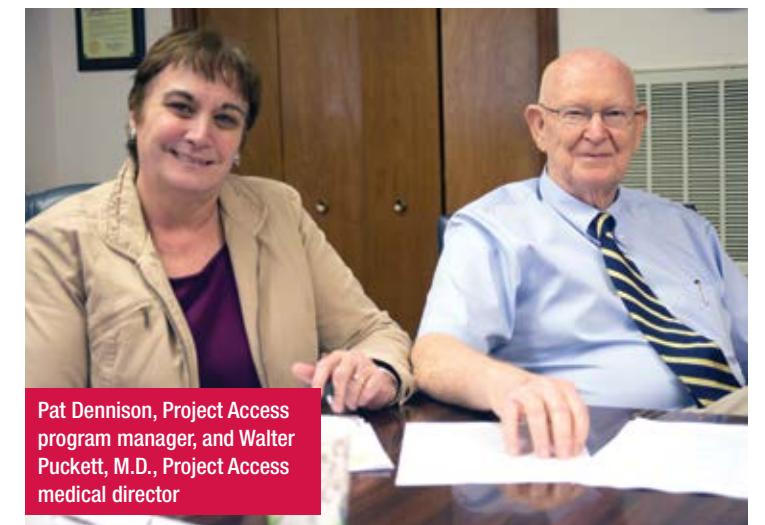
The life-changing impact of Project Access can be best understood through the voices of its patients. Here are three remarkable patient stories.

Ron Holland

After losing his job and health insurance, Ron was admitted to the Volunteers in Medicine medical clinic. A preliminary X-ray revealed a suspicious area in his chest, and he was diagnosed with lung cancer shortly after. Understanding Ron's need for a specialist in the midst of financial hardship, his doctors referred him to Project Access for surgery. In 2007, he underwent a lung resection performed by Dr. Rob Headrick and a round of chemotherapy. By 2008, he was disease-free. But his complications were not over. Ron was working at a new job when bad news struck again. In January of 2013, Dr. Colleen Schmitt, a volunteer gastroenterologist with Volunteers in Medicine, discovered a developing issue that once more required specialist care and referred Ron back to Project Access. After a CT scan discovered signs of esophageal cancer, volunteer surgeons Dr. Headrick and Dr. Charles A. Portera performed an operation to reconstruct his esophagus and save his larynx. Today, Ron is healthy, recovering, still gainfully employed, and thankful for all the



Howard Roddy, Memorial Health Care System, and Robert Bowers, M.D.



Pat Dennison, Project Access program manager, and Walter Puckett, M.D., Project Access medical director

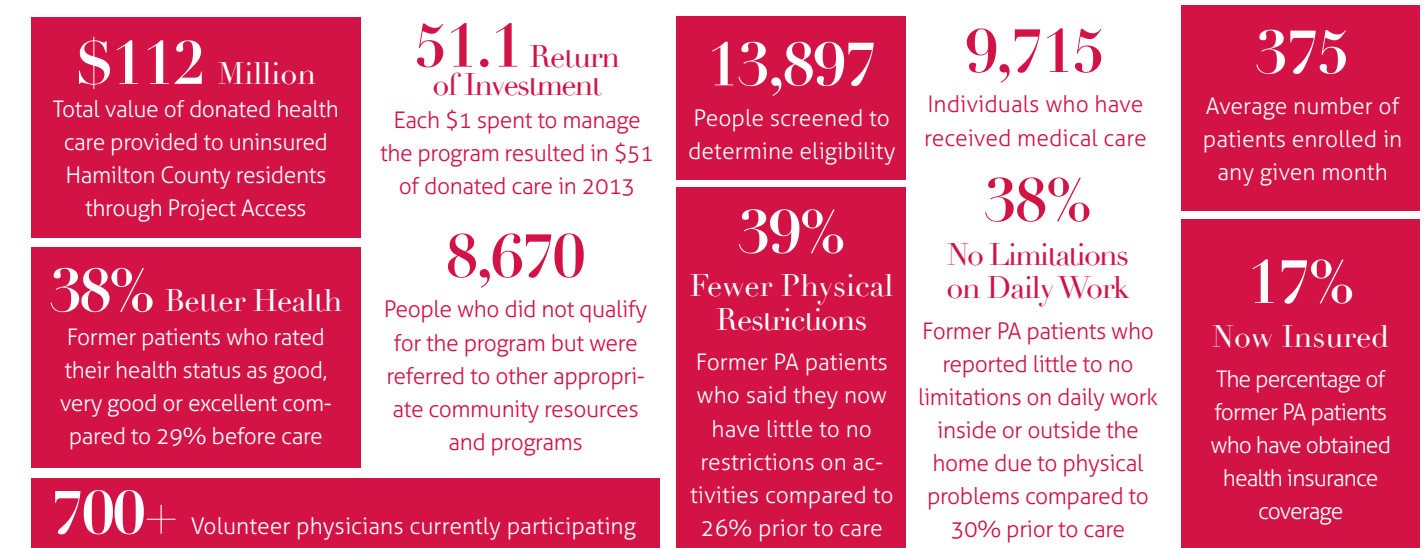
Project Access

By Jenna Haines
Photos by Med Dement

Community Partnerships for Compassionate Care

While affordable health care has become a major political issue in just the last few years, Project Access has been helping low-income patients in Chattanooga find the care they need since 2004. Co-ordinated by the Medical Foundation of Chattanooga in partnership with the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society, Project Access isn't a health insurance program. Rather, it's a network of doctors, hospitals, medical schools, community clinics, and the Hamilton County Health Department that works to provide access to specialty care for patients with medical needs or conditions that require treatment.

Project Access By the Numbers (April 2004-November 2013)





Project Access patient Roy with coordinator Dana Brinkman

remove the benign tumor pressing against his optic nerve. The adenoma is now gone, and Roy's eye sight and blood pressure have improved significantly.

Partnerships with Clinics

One aspect that makes Project Access distinctive is its extensive network of doctors, hospitals, and medical professionals that makes its mission possible. "I think it's unique that so many physicians—so many specialists—have been willing to give their time at no charge to patients that wouldn't have any other recourse except emergency room management," says Dr. Jimmy Davis, a physician at Memorial North

Shore Health Center.

But how does Project Access work with the clinics, exactly? Project Access medical director Dr. Walter Puckett explains that the program acts as a "middleman" of sorts. "If a patient needs specialty care, Project Access facilitates the arrangements to provide that care for that particular patient, who is uninsured and below 150% of the poverty level," he says. "For example, if the patient needs a heart transfer or needs their gallbladder taken out, Project Access facilitates the process for that patient." While Project Access is not intended for primary care, it does provide resources and help to patients needing a primary care home.

support he received from the individuals of the Project Access program.

Donna Hassell

Donna Hassell is responsible for more than her own health. In the last five years, she has also taken care of her 24-year-old son who suffered paralysis from the waist down after a 2008 motorcycle accident. In August of 2012, Donna began to experience her own health concerns when she developed pancreatitis. She went to her primary care physician, Dr. Jimmy Davis of Memorial's North Shore Health Center, who recognized her condition required more attention from a GI specialist. So Donna, in dire condition (she had dropped from 110 pounds to 67 pounds) was referred to Project Access, where she was informed by volunteer physician Dr. Louis Lambiase that she needed a feeding tube inserted to save her life. Reluctantly, Donna agreed. Today, Donna still has the feeding tube in place, but she has not used it for six weeks. Her weight has returned to 97 pounds, and she has been able to ob-

tain both disability and TennCare. While still in recovery, Donna is overjoyed. "There are so many angels in Chattanooga, I just don't know where to begin." She hopes to have the feeding tube removed completely before 2014.

Roy

In 2012, Roy began to experience a loss of vision and hypertension and was referred to Project Access by the Dodson Avenue Community Health Center. After a CT scan revealed that he had a pituitary adenoma, Project Access volunteer Dr. Michael Gallagher of Chattanooga Neurosurgery and Spine deemed it was necessary to perform surgery in order to

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—Dr. Robert Bowers

"There are not many cities like Chattanooga where the medical society is able to pull the hospitals and physicians together and make it work," says Dr. Robert Bowers, a retired doctor who worked previously with Project Access as chairman and volunteer physician. "That's really exceptional. There are just not many programs like it in the country."

The Future of Project Access

Despite recent health care reforms, Project Access volunteers say the program will still be necessary and will continue to provide care for those in need. "Since Tennessee has not expanded Medicaid, our poorest citizens—those under 100% of the federal poverty level—will not be eligible for financial assistance to purchase health insurance," says Rae Young Bond, executive director of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society and Medical Foundation of Chattanooga. "For many of our patients, health insurance will still be financially out of reach. Project Access will still be needed for the foreseeable future."

Project Access calls itself a "community health partnership," and this couldn't be more true. It's about far more than providing financial resources to support those in medical need; it's about creating a cohesive network of medical professionals and institutions that have a patient's best interest in mind.

When it comes to articulating Project Access' ultimate goal, Dr. Jimmy Davis nails it on the head. "Project Access complements the mission of compassion, the heart and soul of medicine."



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