

Health Care Champion | SAFETY NET AWARD

CHOICE Regional Health Network helps the uninsured

As the founding executive director for CHOICE Regional Health Network, Kristen West remembers back 16 years ago when she ran the organization out of her own home with a modest \$100,000 a year operating budget.

Today, CHOICE has 18 employees and an operating budget of \$1.2 million. Their services span five counties including Mason, Thurston, Grays Harbor, Lewis and Pacific.

"I know where every dollar goes because I had to ask somebody for it", says West.

For every local dollar given to CHOICE through membership dues and donations, the organization is able to generate 12 matching dollars from outside the region, allowing it to organize millions of dollars in donated care over the course of its existence.

CHOICE has touched more than 90 percent of the uninsured residents in all five counties, meaning that in some way the network has helped people access services that they needed. There are approximately 24 member organizations in this collaborative including the Twin Harbor's own Mark Reed Hospital, Sea Mar Community Health Center, Grays Harbor Community Hospital, the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties' Public Health and Human Services Departments, and Willapa Harbor Hos-



JACOB JONES | THE DAILY WORLD

The staff of the CHOICE Regional Health Network office, back row from left: Sarah Sanders, Ivan Rodriguez, Katrin Palmer, Gayle Connor and Kara Elliott. Front row from left: Oscar Plazas, Amy Faulk, Holly Greenwood, Libby Weisdepp and Kristen West.

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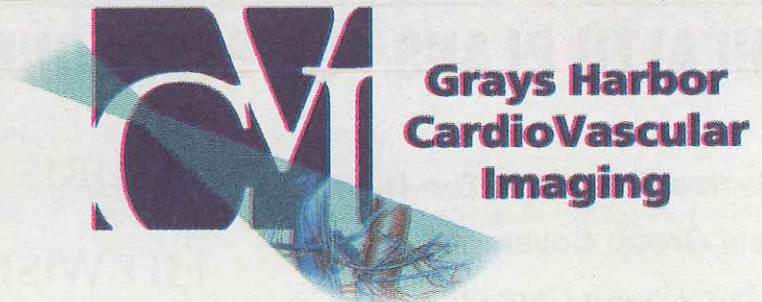
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CHOICE:

pital.

CHOICE also partners with tribal organizations, food banks, clinics, schools and many local community resource groups.

The very first program was deployed in Grays Harbor County. CHOICE began connecting uninsured and low-income individuals with health coverage and local physicians. This is a core service that CHOICE still provides today, along with some major quality health improvement initiatives.

There are two major initiatives currently underway at local hospitals including the Code Stroke Protocol. Prior to the Stroke Protocol implementation, patients were getting the best treatment only 13 percent of the time, say officials. Now the best treatment occurs more than 85 percent of the time.

The other initiative is the Emergency Department Consistent Care Program, which helps coordinate a standard procedure for patients who frequent emergency rooms in local hospitals due to an absence of primary care and/or insurance. CHOICE supplies facilitators and grant writers to help organize and deploy these health initiatives, as well as providing resource coordinators at the facilities to sign people up for benefits.

"If people are worried and scared about their healthcare [options] right now, they don't have to figure it out alone," says West. "We can help them."

To contact CHOICE Regional Health Network for assistance, call toll free at 1-800-981-2123 or visit the website at www.crhcn.org.

INFORMATION FOR YOUR HEALTH

Binge eating is a recognized disorder

While most men and women are aware of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia, some might be surprised to learn binge eating is considered an eating disorder as well.

Recently recognized as a disorder, binge eating is a serious mental health disorder in which thinking patterns and emotions cause a person to overeat or starve.

Binge eating can be an attempt to cope with other conditions, including depression, stress or anxiety. Unfortunately, this unhealthy coping mechanism typically only worsens the problem, as binge eaters often feel guilty after bingeing, which then exacerbates their feelings of depression or anxiety.

The bingeing that characterizes binge eating disorder is similar to the bingeing behavior exhibited by people suffering from bulimia nervosa.

However, people with binge eating disorder do not purge or vomit after bingeing.

The cause of binge eating remains a riddle for researchers,

"The cause of binge eating remains a riddle for researchers, though there does appear to be a link with binge eating and depression."

though there does appear to be a link with binge eating and depression.

Nearly half of all people with binge eating disorder also have a history of depression, and many people indicate that a binge eating episode is triggered by negative emotions such as sadness, anger, boredom, or anxiety.

Researchers have also noted that eating disorders tend to run in families and might be more likely to afflict families that place an unnatural emphasis on food, be it rewarding positive acts or behaviors with food or employing food as a tool to soothe and comfort.

Each of these things supports the belief that eating disorders

result not necessarily from a single factor, but rather a combination of psychological, environmental and biological factors.

For those who suspect they or someone they love has a problem with binge eating, the following are some of the more common symptoms:

- Fluctuations in weight
- Frequently eating what is considered by most to be large amounts of food
- Eating much more quickly than usual
- A loss of control over what or how much is being eaten
- Eating until uncomfortably full
- Eating extraordinary amounts of food, even when not hungry
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt or even depression after overeating
- Eating alone because the quantity of food being eaten is embarrassing

To learn more about eating disorders, visit the National Institute of Mental Health at www.nimh.gov.

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