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## COVER STORY

### Urban Health celebrates Ribbon-Cutting and New “Home” Model

Story by Debralee Santos and Ryan Maye Handy

Photos by Ryan Maye Handy

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A new medical home model, Urban Health Plan CEO Paloma Hernández explained, “...means 24-7 care, at any time of the day. We are here Sundays, and open early and late. We have walk-in services.”

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On Wed., April 6th, a crowd of over 50 health care workers gathered in the lobby of Urban Health Plan to greet Dr. Thomas Farley, New York City Health Commissioner, and Dr. Nirav Shah, the New York State Commissioner of the Department of Health.

Dr. Shah, the youngest New York State Health Commissioner to date, and the many distinguished guests had come to celebrate National Health Week, and the official opening of a new floor in the clinic’s facilities on Southern Boulevard.

Together with Urban CEO Paloma Hernández and founder Dr. Richard Izquierdo, he cut the ribbon in front of the new wing’s door.

In a short speech before the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Shah said that Urban Health’s success makes it an ideal mentor for other community health centers.

He also took note of the new model, a patient-centered medical home, pioneered by Urban Health.

“A medical home to me is a health care provider who’s thinking of your health even when you are not,” Shah said.

He praised Urban Health for being a part of the initiative to focus more on preventative care for patients. The work done by Urban Health helps to cut down the number of unnecessary hospitalizations, on which the state government spends \$1.4 billion, according to Shah.

“Whereas the traditional center was built around the doctor and a budget, this new model is centered around what’s good for the patients,” said Shah.

CEO Hernández, resplendent in a red suit and beaming, expounded on the merits of the model.

“This means 24-7 care, at any time of the day. We are here Sundays, and open early and late. We have walk-in services,” she noted.

After the speech, Hernández led Shah up four flights of stairs to the new ward, which will be reserved for gynecology, podiatry, and adult medicine.

As Shah, Hernández, and Izquierdo cut the bright-blue ribbon, guests admired the spotlessly clean new ward.

Annie Lopez, Urban Health’s OBGYN coordinator, paraded with the guests through the empty examination rooms, inspecting the new equipment.

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“It’s beautiful,” she said of the wing, with its 13 examination rooms, and the sea-foam-painted waiting room. Lopez estimated that the new wing would help Urban Health to accommodate 4,000 new patients.

Judy Wessler, director of the Commission on the Public’s Health System, was also among those listening to Shah’s speech and touring the new examination rooms. Wessler’s organization plans to honor Hernández for her work at Urban Health, although expressed disappointment with the work done by Shah and the Medicaid Redesign Panel.

Shah had spoken proudly of the over 1000 suggestions the panel received from the public—Wessler maintains that the panel ignored most of them.

Still, Wessler was impressed by the new clinic wing.

And so were the many patients who happened upon the ceremony as they tended to their own appointments at the clinic.

Janet, who wheeled her toddler son Jayden past, stopped to watch for a moment as photographs were taken, smiled.

“I like it here. They are all really nice,” she said, gazing up at the podium.

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