

Tulane University School of Medicine Leads Trip to Boston's Community Health Centers

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Tulane University's School of Medicine will lead a group of New Orleans medical, business and political leaders, including City Council member Jacquelyn Clarkson and a representative from state Sen. Ann Duplessis' office, on a tour of Boston's community health centers March 4 and 5. The purpose of the tour is to determine how Boston's system of high quality, cost-effective neighborhood health centers could be replicated in New Orleans.

Dr. Benjamin Sachs, who held several appointments at Harvard Medical School, including chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, before being named senior vice president and dean of Tulane University School of Medicine in November, believes the Boston model may be the answer to providing primary care to low-income and uninsured residents in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Katrina shuttered Charity hospital, which served as the medical home for uninsured patients in the New Orleans metro area for decades prior to the storm.

"In the aftermath of Katrina, New Orleans has the opportunity to customize our own community health centers and build them to suit each community given its specific needs and culture. They are a crucial step towards healing our city," Sachs said.

Sachs, who came up with the idea of the tour, said the sites the group will visit, the Bowdoin Street Community Health Center, the Dimock Community Health Center and the South Cove Health Center, are true community centers providing not only medical care but a safe haven for children to study after school or attend neighborhood events.

The Boston visit will be hosted by Dr. Karen DeSalvo, vice dean of community affairs and health policy at Tulane. DeSalvo was instrumental in starting the Tulane

University Community Health Center at Covenant House.

The center opened in the days following Hurricane Katrina as a source for urgent care for returning residents in the Bywater, French Quarter, Treme and downtown New Orleans. It has evolved into a neighborhood medical home that provides adult primary care, mental health counseling, geriatric care and health education.

"Community health centers have a proven record of success in Boston and other urban areas. I believe they can be the new face of primary medical care in New Orleans as well. The benefits to the patients and community are vast," DeSalvo said.