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LONGEVITY & ADAPTABILITY

A Foundation for Health

by Jessica Thomas, LMH Health, photo by Jeff Burkhead

After 100 years in Lawrence, LMH Health continues to grow and serve the community in the way in which it was intended by its founders, leaving no one without the option of medical care.

For over 100 years, Lawrence Memorial Hospital has been serving the Lawrence community. It was founded with the purpose to serve all members of the community with the belief that all people deserve a place of comfort and safety to receive medical care.

How It Began

Before 1921, there was no public-owned hospital in the Lawrence area. If you needed medical care, your only option was to visit a private medical provider, who usually only had a handful of beds for patients. As the community continued to grow, the availability of those hospital beds became scarce.

When a man suffered a seizure while walking down Massachusetts Street in the early 1900s, there was no public hospital for him to be sent to. Dr. Ralph E. Barnes attended to the man and traveled around the community in search of a private medical provider with an open bed to treat him, but there was nothing available. Without access to immediate medical treatment, the man passed away in Barnes' car that day. This tragic event sparked the idea of creating a public-owned hospital in Lawrence, Kansas.

Barnes had decided he was going to make it his business to create a place where a friendless old man could at least have a place to die, and he called attention to the fact that there was no publicly owned hospital in Lawrence where needy poor could be taken for treatment and care.

He took action by visiting the Social Service League, which was a group that tried to help the poor and needy. The Social Service League agreed to install a bed in a room that was formerly a cell house at 546 Vermont St. This single bed was attended to by The Metropolitan Insurance visiting nurse, who dedicated her time to helping patients who needed care.

With the beginning of the community hospital in Lawrence, the demand for beds increased rapidly. The hospital went from one to five beds, but it needed many more. With the end of World War I in 1918, the Douglas County Chapter of the American Red Cross found itself in possession of a large sum of money that did not have an objective for its use. Red Cross would not allow the money to be put toward a hospital, so the money was put toward the Lawrence Public Health Nursing Association instead. This organization allowed Lawrence to set up a first-class health department and endowed more funds that it could use.

The Public Health Nursing Association donated $2,500 to the Social Service League to buy a frame house at Third

and Maine streets, which was named the city hospital. This hospital was known as Lawrence Memorial Hospital and was created to benefit all inhabitants of the city of Lawrence and anyone sick or injured within its city limits.

The original Lawrence Memorial Hospital opened to the public on Jan. 17, 1921. The hospital underwent normal operations until Elizabeth Miller Watkins, a philanthropist who supported the city of Lawrence in many ways, generously offered to donate money to build a new modern hospital building. With her $200,000 donation, Watkins paid for the construction costs of Lawrence Memorial Hospital's new 50-bed hospital building, which opened in 1929. Watkins continued to make donations to the hospital, allowing it to further expand and help more patients.

Shaping the Future

Because of Barnes' caring and innovative mindset, Lawrence Memorial Hospital has become what it is today.

Lawrence Memorial Hospital, now LMH Health, has continued to grow with a passion since its opening in 1921. The organization now consists of a 174-bed hospital, an outpatient care center—LMH Health West—and numerous clinics throughout the Douglas County area.

The organization is home to nearly 2,000 employees, physicians and advanced practice providers who strive to deliver patient-first care that is innovative, diverse and meaningful to both patients and employees. The workforce is full of generations of families and couples who work to shape the future of health care in the Lawrence community. Some employees at LMH Health have personal connections to the organization, including themselves, their parents or their children having been born at the hospital.

LMH Health continues to be a community-owned, not-for-profit, safety-net hospital that serves the health-care needs of the community regardless of an individual's ability to pay. Dedicated to improving the health of the community, LMH Health invests all excess revenues in services, equipment and facilities, which further that mission.

Even after 100 years, LMH Health is proud to have stuck with Barnes' founding mission: to increase access to primary care and specialty services that would not normally be available to the Lawrence community. ▲

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