Watch Jill Biden Talk Cancer and COVID-19 at an HIV and LGBTQ Clinic

First Lady Jill Biden visited a Whitman-Walker clinic to discuss health care, including cancer prevention, COVID-19 vaccines and broadband access.

January 25, 2021 By Trent Straube

Two days after the presidential inauguration, First Lady Jill Biden shone the national spotlight on cancer prevention and COVID-19 by discussing health care issues as she toured one of the sites of Whitman-Walker Health, which provides wellness and health services to the LGBTQ and HIV communities in Washington, DC.

Biden was joined by Naseema Shafi, the CEO of Whitman-Walker Health, and Kim Thiboldeaux, the CEO of Cancer Support Community. You can watch their discussion in the C-SPAN video below.

Stressing the importance of cancer screenings, Thiboldeaux noted that screenings dropped nearly 90% in March but remain one third lower than usual because of COVID-19 disruptions; however, as she and Shafi highlighted, it's now safe to have screenings.

They also discussed the growing demand for continued care for cancer survivors, the ways COVID-19 has upended services and how health care providers are meeting clients' needs during the pandemic, including through expanded telehealth services.

"Broadband is a health equity issue," said Thiboldeaux, explaining that a lot of patients don't have access to the technology needed for telehealth services. "We really need to fight for better access."

Biden, who has a doctorate in education and teaches at a community college, agreed. She added that national legislation is needed to address the issue of broadband access. What's more, she said, it's also an important issue for schools because students and teachers access education via the internet.

"We're in your corner," Biden said to Thiboldeaux and Shafi. "We have to work together and address these things. But the first thing we have to do is address this [COVID-19] pandemic and get everyone vaccinated and back to work and back to school. As Joe announced this week, the pandemic is his No. 1 priority at this moment."

Why tour an LGBTQ-focused health clinic to discuss cancer and COVID-19? As a federally qualified health center, Whitman-Walker serves about 20,000 unique individuals every year, Shafi explained; about 3,500 of them are living with HIV, and 2,000 are transgender and gender expansive.

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But Whitman-Walker's unique partnership with the Cancer Support Community sets an example for other health centers that cater to local communities and individuals who are underserved and disproportionately affected by cancer (including African Americans and people with HIV). Each year, Whitman-Walker Health provides about 12,000 cancer screenings—including on-site colonoscopies, which results in fewer referrals, Shafi said. The health center also offers wraparound services such as counseling, an in-house pharmacy and insurance navigation with the goal of bringing cancer services to federally qualified health centers and the communities they serve.

Cancer Support Community is a global nonprofit network of 175 locations; it launched in 2009 with the merger of The Wellness Community and Gilda's Club Worldwide (named after comedian Gilda Radner).

Whitman-Walker Health, through its several DC locations, aims to "provide stigma-free care to anyone who walks through our doors. We are proud and honored to be a place where the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer communities as well as those living with or affected by

HIV feel supported, welcomed and respected.”

To learn more about these health topics, visit the Cancer Basics on CancerHealth.com, COVID-19 Basics on COVIDHealth.com and HIV/AIDS Basics on POZ.com.

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