

## **Fitts receives Healthcare Transformation Award at Communities Joined in Action Conference in Washington, DC**

Robert "Casey" Fitts, MD, Medical Director of the Tri-County Project Care in South Carolina, was honored with the *2011 Healthcare Transformation Award* during Communities Joined in Action's (CJA) 6th Annual Conference "*Improving Health – Eliminating Disparities in an Age of Healthcare Reform*" held October 5-6, in Washington, D.C.

The Healthcare Transformation award is a peer-nomination award. Individuals are recognized for the creation of a replicable and transferable idea, tool, project, or learning that has value in community safety net care. The awardee is invited to share their idea, tool, project or learning with the national membership of CJA through online learning, and to include related documents as a resource in the CJA Library of Best Practices.

The dedication of Dr. Casey Fitts to South Carolina's patients and to the medical safety net has joined community health programs that use local nonprofit, philanthropic and faith-based organizations already in existence to ensure that all patients have access to quality affordable healthcare. Taking a year off from private surgical practice, Casey dedicated himself to finding a solution to care for the uninsured, becoming personally involved in founding, funding and furthering two such programs that coordinate local resources to provide care for the uninsured in their communities. For those with no ability to pay, these networks organize their hospitals, doctors and clinics to provide the care for free through the AccessHealth Tri-County Network. For those with some ability to pay, a local discount system is made affordable through Tri-County Project Care. Through quantifiable results, the program has realized sustainable funding sources, ongoing legislative support, and continuing partnerships with similar programs across the state. To date, Dr. Fitts program has provided over \$30 million in healthcare services to over 3,500 patients throughout the state.

Dr. Fitts has created a well-worn path to the State House, speaking to legislators and lobbyists about funding, serving on panels committed to public health, and working to permanently establish legislation allowing community based health programs, similar to Tri-County Project Care, to collect federal subsidies as qualified health plans serving the uninsured or underinsured in the state. The results of his efforts are a stellar example to other healthcare champions and states furthering their own medical safety nets.

"Without a doubt, Casey has proven himself a leader and champion of medicine and public health through his spirit of community and innovation and through his passion and commitment to systemic change. He fights an uphill battle but perseveres because, if I've heard him say it once, I have heard him say 100 times, 'not only does this model make sense economically, but it is the right thing to do,'" said Suzanne Kuppens, RN, Program Director for Tri-County Project Care. Kuppens went on to say that "Casey's work has definitely created a replicable and transferable model and has added value to our community."

More than 200 community health leaders were on hand to witness the honor being bestowed during the awards ceremony. As part of the annual 3-day conference, they had traveled to Washington to share best practices for reducing health disparities in light of the new national health policy, hear presentations from community leaders, foundation representatives, health plans, and top US officials. CJA's vision includes disruptive change that broadens and strengthens the health care system by addressing head on the social determinants of health, such as unhealthy housing conditions, transportation barriers, lack of food, and continuous healthcare access and coverage.

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**About CJA:** CJA's nearly 200 member organizations work for approximately 8.5 million individuals who are underserved by the traditional health care community. Founded in 2001, CJA is a national membership organization of local and state health collaboratives committed to improving the health of individuals, families, and populations. CJA is a leader in mobilizing communities to build public/private community-based partnerships that ensure access to needed health and human services that produce positive health outcomes. CJA convenes and supports leaders from across the health community to help achieve better health for all people at less cost.