

Refugee Health

By Marc Altschuler, MD

For many refugees, their time in America begins in tumult. There is housing to find, job placement, a battery of forms, schools to enroll in, and a host of other boxes to check that would daunt even a native-born person. Unsurprisingly, health can fall by the wayside in all of this.

The Jefferson Center for Refugee Health (JCRH) came about as a way to combat this issue after a handful of residents approached me seeking guidance on how to learn about and engage in cross-cultural care. Now entering its 10th year, JCRH has gone from an informal, one-off clinic to a mainstay of Jefferson's residency curriculum and Philadelphia's mission to welcome those fleeing oppression.

Our focus on the long-term doctor-patient relationship is not seen in other cities, which do great work, but tend to focus on moving new arrivals through the paperwork pipeline after providing the legally required medical evaluation. We believe a longitudinal approach better serves our patients by establishing a medical home and preventing them from becoming lost in our country's large, complicated healthcare apparatus.

Each year, JCRH sees approximately 1,500 new patients, or 25–30 percent of Pennsylvania's refugee intake, in addition to those with whom we have already



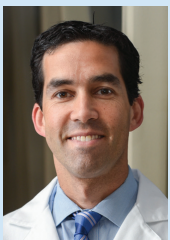
developed a relationship. Our patient care and training programs have been so successful that we are now a nationwide model for refugee health.

Locally, our partnership with the Nationality Services Center, among the largest resettlement services providers in the city, was the catalyst for the Philadelphia Refugee Health Collaborative. This multi-agency, multihospital network coordinates all aspects of refugee healthcare, from initial evaluation to regular check-ups or specialty procedures.

In fact, Philadelphia is the only city in the country to bring its academic medical centers to bear on this issue, with most places utilizing small, isolated clinics. This is a wonderful arrangement because not only do

our patients have access to cutting-edge expertise, our residents have an amazing opportunity to learn what it means to deliver compassionate care across cultural boundaries.

For more than 30 years Jefferson's Department of Family and Community Medicine has cared for underserved populations, always searching for ways to keep our most vulnerable neighbors from falling through the cracks. We promise to carry on this mission through our continuing service to Philadelphia's recently arrived and resident refugee populations, along with the thousands of immigrants who call the City of Brotherly Love home.



Marc Altschuler, MD, is director of the Jefferson Center for Refugee Health as well as an associate professor and associate residency director in the Department of Family and Community Medicine. He is an alumnus of Sidney Kimmel Medical College and the Department of Family and Community Medicine's residency program. Altschuler and the Department received the 2017 Margaret Harris Award from the NSC. He is a Philadelphia native. For more information on Jefferson's efforts to assist the refugee population, please email Marc.Altshuler@jefferson.edu.