



From the desk of the CEO
 Mario J. Paredes

***SOMOS Tu Familia*—health care for undocumented children**

THIS FALL, a unique partnership between the State of New York and an independent network of New York City physicians is ensuring that thousands of undocumented Hispanic minors detained at the US border and brought to New York will have access to superior health care—at no cost. It is part of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Golden Door initiative, which is housing the children and youth—most of them separated from their parents or unaccompanied—to sponsor homes, which could be a parent, another relative or a non-family member home, throughout the state.

To provide quality healthcare to the more than 2,000 undocumented children housed in New York City, the Governor called on Dr. Ramon Tallaj, founder and chairman of SOMOS Community Care. SOMOS is a network of some 3000 physicians, most of them Primary Care Physicians, operating more than 1,000 practices and clinics and serving about a million low-income patients in New York City—most of them Hispanics.

The SOMOS doctors will care for the youth and their family unit in the homes themselves, or in their offices or practices. This patient population is part of some 40,000 undocumented minors who are caught trying to cross the US border per year. Their situation is the result of at least a decade of chaotic, inconsistent, and unsettled US immigration policy and, most recently, of the harsh measures of the Trump Administration in separating the minors from their parents.

The children’s future immigration status is highly uncertain and the shelter system—though there are provisions for some children to be placed with foster families—is a panacea at best; moreover, it must be added, the shelter system is sustained by big business interests, which decidedly do not serve the best, long-term interests of the children and youth. In the long run, it is crucial that the nation’s political leadership finds a workable solution that will unite these undocumented children with their parents. Sad to say, as things stand today, in countless cases the children don’t even know where their parents are and vice versa.

In response to Governor Cuomo’s request to provide healthcare for the undocumented children and youth, Dr. Tallaj created *SOMOS Tu Familia*, which translates as: “We Are Your Family.” The initiative is spearheaded for SOMOS Community Care by Ricardo Rivera-Cardona, the Chief Business Development Officer and the official formerly in charge of Medicaid in Puerto Rico. The SOMOS doctors dispatched will be able to play the role of trusted family figures, leaders of these temporary, improvised communities that are home to the undocumented minors, as well as homeless adults, undocumented and otherwise.



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SOMOS doctors come well prepared. As members of the SOMOS Community Care network, they have signed on to have their compensation pegged to the long(er)-term flourishing of the patients under their care. They are getting paid according to the Value-Based Payment (VBP) formula, which is at the core of the New York State Department of Health's Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program, which provides high-quality, Value-Based Care to the poorest patients.

Among 24 other so-called Performing Provider Systems (PPSs) operating under the DSRIP mandate, SOMOS Community Care is the only PPS that is led by a network of individual doctors, many of them independent small-business men and women—this, in contrast to the inevitably more impersonal, corporate-style PPSs that are administered by large hospital systems. Most of the SOMOS doctors live and work in the same communities as they patients they serve; they speak the language and know the culture of the families they care for; in many cases, SOMOS doctors live in the same neighborhood as their patients.

This physical and cultural proximity makes SOMOS' doctors ideal providers under DSRIP, which is designed to deliver superior care to the most needy Medicaid patients; better care—Value-Based Care—hinges on proactive, comprehensive health care. This approach also takes into account mental health issues, as well as the so-called Social Determinants of Health—such as housing, hygiene, employment, education—factors, among others, that can impact an individual's health as well as that of her or his family.

Being literally and figuratively close to their patients, SOMOS doctors are able to provide comprehensive, personalized care—care in which the quality of the doctor-patient relationship plays a vital role; this relationship has to be one of mutual trust. It is thus that Value-Based Care is sustained; it makes for a quality of care that, ultimately, keeps patients out of emergency rooms and hospitals as a last resort. Aided by SOMOS Community Health Workers, SOMOS doctors literally and figuratively keep an eye on their patients. As such, Value-Based Care is on track to save New York State taxpayers billions of dollars by the time the DSRIP mandate concludes in spring 2020.

For Dr. Tallaj, SOMOS Community Care, driven by its Pay-for-Performance model, is particularly geared toward raising the quality of health care provided to the poorest Hispanic patients in New York City. Come the end of DSRIP, SOMOS Community Care will continue operating as a for-profit entity, whose long-term success is bound to inspire similar efforts in other parts of the country, where low-income Hispanics and other minorities stand in need of better health care—personalized, comprehensive care that the traditional fee-based Medicaid system has proven unable to deliver.



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Now, SOMOS doctors, well-equipped to deal with Spanish-speaking patients, will care for the undocumented minors and their family unit in New York City. And besides providing superior physical care, the job of these doctors—who can bank on the contributions of a full range of specialists—will also include ensuring care for the youngsters’ psychological suffering caused by being separated from their parents and extended family; that dimension of these young patients’ pain can cause a lifetime of harm. Again, only political action can provide a permanent solution on this score and put an end to an inhumane immigration policy that splits families apart.