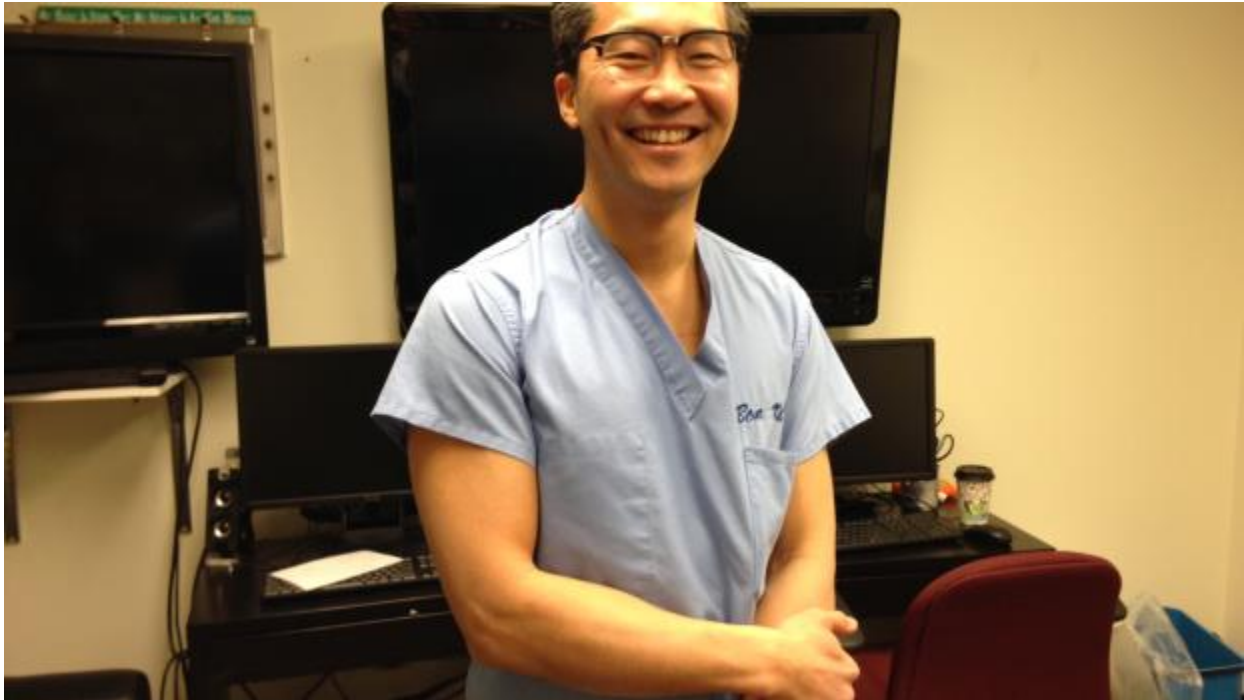


Homeless Hospital Patients Now Have A Care Facility Where They Can Recover

March 29, 2014
By Tim Jimenez



Dr. Bon Ku (Credit: Tim Jimenez)

PHILADELPHIA (CBS) - Homeless men who are hospitalized in Philadelphia now have a safe place in Germantown to recover once they are discharged. It is a pilot program that has been in the works for a few years and organizers are hoping it can expand to help even more.

In the eight years that Dr. Bon Ku has been working at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital's emergency room, he has seen many patients come in for treatment but then have no where else to go.

"We see a lot of homeless patients on a daily basis. It's incredibly frustrating seeing the same patients who repeatedly come to the emergency department and a lot of them get discharged back to the streets even though they may have an acute medical condition," he said. "So, for example, a patient with pneumonia that I see. Unfortunately, I have to discharge them back to the street with a prescription for antibiotics. It's tough – an inhumane thing to do."

However, that Ku is hoping that is about to change. After years of planning, and caring for the homeless within and outside the confines of a hospital, Ku says those patients can now recover at an eight bed respite care facility at the DePaul House men's shelter at 5725 Sprague Street.

“It’s very difficult if you have a broken ankle or if you have pneumonia – the flu – to recover on the street. So, this provides them a safe environment where they can go two weeks to a month where they can receive care,” he said.

The program is currently funded with money from the city of Philadelphia, the state, area hospitals and Philadelphia-based Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC). Melissa Fox, PHMC’s Managing Director of Health Services, says this respite care facility is the first of its kind in the city, which she says has been lagging behind.

“Around the country I think there are a little over 60 medical respite programs in cities. We knew that here in Philadelphia there was a real need for that service,” she said.

Deborah McMillan, PHMC’s director of homeless and social service programs, says the facility will be staffed by a full-time respite nurse, a nurse’s aide, and support staff from the DePaul House.

“Five days a week there is that type of service available where we’ll be able to connect or reconnect the patients with behavioral health or substance abuse or if they need benefits,” McMillan said. “More importantly if a housing plan can be made for them – we’ll immediately look at where can our patients go when they are really healed and well.”

Dr. Ku expressed excitement and gratitude that something he has been championing has become a reality. He says it shows what can be done with cooperation.

“It’s exciting that we’re partnering together for this cause. I really think that’s what we need, a partnership in order to deliver better care to one of the underserved populations in Philadelphia,” he said.

The facility opened in the beginning of March but there have not been any patients yet according to Fox, who remains optimistic. PHMC is hoping the program succeeds so that it can grow to serve homeless women and those from different parts of the city.

“Eight beds, we know isn’t enough,” Fox said, “but eight beds is a start.”

Source: CBS Philly

<http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2014/03/29/homeless-hospital-patients-now-have-a-care-facility-where-they-can-recover/>