Mountain Park Health Center (MPHC) has delivered comprehensive healthcare services in the valley for over 30 with the mission of working with communities to sustain and improve health through affordable primary care. The CHPDP is proud to call MPHC a research partner and we’d like to share more about this organization and our partnership from two MPC staff members, Marta Ormeno and Valentina Hernandez!

Please describe your background, position at MPHC, and work with the CHPDP.

V: I am currently the Director of Integrated Nutrition Services and I oversee our team of dieticians and promotoras*. I came to Mountain Park and loved being able to serve the population as a nutritionist. I was the only one at that time! I felt good because I could offer nutrition counseling in Spanish, which was unheard of at that time and they appreciated it so much. I couldn’t imagine doing anything different. Now we have 17 dietitians and 3 promotoras (which is a hard position to fill).

I have known Dr. Gabe Shaibi (Director of CHPDP) for a while and we’d been looking for opportunities to partner because we thought it would be such a good match! We teach a lot of classes to our patients so we have a large emphasis on childhood obesity because it is such a big problem in our community. Dr. Shaibi and I have always rallied around the same issue of childhood obesity! When he creates his research ideas and projects, we try to see if MPHC can join forces to create something that will impact the community and also find new ways or strategies to target this challenging problem. That’s my big drive: find ways that will help our families combat childhood obesity and sustain the healthy behaviors!

M: I started in Mexico as a doctor, organizing and campaigning with people from the community to help with vaccinations since 1986. I have been with MPHC for over six years now as a promotora, I help MPHC with diabetes programs and their “All Kids Can” program which helps overweight kids. I have been working with the CHPDP faculty and staff on ¡Viva Maryvale! for over a year now. I am trying to do all I can to help the families so they know there is support for them in-case they need it and it helps with the CHPDP research as well.

V: Marta is not bragging enough! Marta is a promotora and that is a very important position here at MPHC! She’s the “bridge” between the community and the provider. She knows the families, she brings them to classes, builds relationships with them, and that is key when we are trying to recruit for anything because she’s the face the patients trust. They feel welcome when they see her at the clinic because they feel she knows their challenges and helps them get what they need. She does an amazing job! When we look for promotoras we look for people who have a natural desire to help their community, who already have that connection with the community. Usually it’s something they have been doing without the title.

How would you describe MPHC offerings to the community?

M: MPHC is heaven to the community! When they come here there can access many different services and providers including doctors and nurses the promotoras, dietitians, and the support staff who are always willing to help. Patients feel like this is their home! Not only is their healthcare here but there is help for many, many things! We can help with getting food or even activities and the center offers many different classes. Everyone knows something about services outside the clinic and patients benefit from their connections with MPHC!

V: MPHC is a primary care center and it has adult and family medicine with pediatrics and OB/GYN. We have our own pharmacy, WIC, dental, behavioral health services, nutrition services, and like Marta said, we have a variety of classes and resources. We can treat anyone regardless of insurance status. It’s affordable healthcare delivered in a way that is truly sensitive to the patient.
The CHPDP mission as a transdisciplinary and collaborative research center, is to focus on enhancing the health and well-being of diverse populations across the lifespan with the help of community partners. How do you see MPHC and CHPDP benefitting from this partnership in regards to our organizations and your patients?

V: Part of the benefit is that we (MPHC) get to build relationships with other CHPDP partners, such as the YMCA, St. Vincent DePaul, and Phoenix Children’s Hospital. These opportunities open the door for collaboration in ways that may not be related to research but offer our providers an option for patients they may be struggling with., As we continue to expand our network and collaborative activities we can provide better care for patients and build our collective capacity for health promotion and disease prevention.

M: It works both ways because sometimes people may not qualify for the research but they are in need of some type of service that they find after being sent to MPHC by a partner. All the partners find ways to collaborate and the community is who benefits.

V: We all work so well together because we put the community first and the research helps the communities in the end.

What are the primary health concerns in the communities you serve?

M: One is diabetes and we offer them classes about making healthy changes. I am persistent with contacting the patients who need to come back and be rechecked or need additional care. I love it! I love it when someone is helped!

V: Those are the issues: access to affordable care. We work with diabetes and obesity the most. All chronic diseases start somewhere so it’s our goal to prevent this. For example, we’d like to prevent diabetes because it’s an on-going struggle to manage.

What do you hope to see more of this coming year for both MPHC as a whole and your work here?

V: MPHC is growing right now! We are expanding current clinics and a new location in Tempe will be opening soon. We’re hoping to be able to offer more services, hiring more promotoras, and trying to expand our reach! We’d also like to expand on the research side of things with ASU. We’ve been working on Viva Maryvale but we’re also going to support additional research projects in our other MPHC clinics. We hope to expand on Viva Maryvale and be able to enroll more patients. We see that those who participate actually benefit and we would like to see those benefit extended to more families Also, our providers love the program and the opportunity to collaborate...the only thing holding us back is resources to expand. We know we can do so much more!

What makes you passionate about the work you do at MPHC?

M: I am a doctor from Mexico and 30 years ago I came to learn English. I postponed that many times because I had a husband and kids with little time. Then, about seven years ago, I heard about a promotora position at the Baseline MPHC location and I was asked if I knew anyone who would want to become a promotora. I asked more about MPHC and the services they offered and wanted to do it myself! Before I started working here my house was a “community center” because I have four kids and many others came to our house asking about resources in the community. When I started, I helped with the diabetes classes, calling to remind people about the classes, and then all the knowledge I had started coming back. It started to feel like heaven for me! It very natural for me to help my community and that makes me happy!

V: My passion is the community, in many different ways, but mostly by making sure people have the resources they need and high quality healthcare that that is affordable. I really believe in the mission of MPHC and I like to bring services to patients that would otherwise not have access. When I hear about opportunities that our patients can participate in, like the research projects through ASU, I try to make it work so we can offer patients things they may not
know about. That’s what I love about my job and our partnership. It brings opportunities to people that we alone may not be able to offer. Seeing patients benefit from those resources makes me like my job even more!

*promotora: a lay Hispanic/Latino community member who receives specialized training to provide basic health education in the community without being a professional health care worker. (Source: https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8&q=promotora)