



A Newsletter Published by Community Health of South Florida, Inc.

## Generations of Doris Ison’s Relatives Visit CHI for Reunion



*President and CEO, Blake Hall, takes a selfie with Doris Ison’s family.*

When Doris Ison founded Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI) in 1971, she rallied a group of volunteer doctors to work out of two double-wide trailers on SW 216th Street. The move was a desperate measure to stop black people from dying enroute to Jackson Hospital downtown. Without any medical resources for minorities on the Southern end of the county, Ison saw the need and decided to meet it – any way she could.

Today, her dream has grown into 13 health centers, 35 school-based suites and more, providing comprehensive high-quality care to more than 65,000 patients a year.

This summer, dozens of Ison’s relatives came to visit the Doris Ison Health Center, but many had never been and did not realize just how big Ison’s vision had become.

"I am really in awe and humbled at the fact that her dream and her legacy, along with all the people that helped her at that time, were carried out," said Kim Capers, a second cousin of Ison. "I know it couldn't have been easy with laws and regulations at the time that excluded the minority class. But I think CHI has really developed a program that is inclusive of everyone."

The visit was part of a family reunion. Together, they learned about the services and programs now provided by CHI and the impact the organization is making on the community.

Herbert Clarke is Ison's nephew. He worked as a Case Manager at CHI in the late 90s and has not been back since, until now.

**"It's tremendous, the growth and impact on the community," said Clarke. "It's significant...just awesome."**

CHI's President and CEO, Blake Hall, greeted the Ison family in the boardroom with a copy of the CHI History Book, "Standing in the Gap," for each of them. He presented an overview of all the services and programs the organization offers along with the demographics of the patients served. He also spoke about developments like the Brodes H. Hartley,

Jr. Teaching Health Center, dedicated to training the next generation of doctors and healthcare professionals, as well as the capital campaign to build the Children's Crisis Center for kids with severe behavioral health issues. It is a project now under construction.

"It's been a great journey, and it truly is an honor to be part of the evolution of Ison's dream," said Hall as he became emotional. "It's now a mission that I share with my team here and gives us purpose every day."

Generations of Ison's family sat around the boardroom table admiring the work, commitment and compassion of the CHI staff.

"I think about how Ison, a tomato picker, was able to start something of this magnitude," Tiffani Helberg, Vice President for Communication, told the Ison family. **"It inspires me and reminds me that anything is possible when you are determined to make a change and lives are at stake."**

Many of Ison's relatives vowed to stay committed and connected to CHI like Carolyn Taylor Pates who has served as a board member for years. They want to watch Doris Ison's vision continue to blossom for people of all races and demographics.



# President & CEO Message

As we near the end of the year, I want you to know that our mission to provide quality healthcare to our patients and community remains as strong as ever. With the opening of our two health centers just around the corner, exciting developments are on the horizon. We are hard at work, and construction is nearly complete. The Key Largo and Coconut Grove Health Centers will open this fall, bringing top-notch care to even more people. This expansion continues the legacy of Doris Ison, ensuring that healthcare is accessible to all in South Miami-Dade and Monroe counties.

September is Suicide Prevention Month, so I want to take a moment to reflect on the importance of mental health awareness, especially during the difficult times we all face. Life's challenges can sometimes feel overwhelming, and it's crucial to remember that prioritizing our mental health is just as important as caring for our physical health.

To the incredible patients we serve here at Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI): You are the heart of our community, constantly ensuring your loved ones are supported and cared for. This month, I want to encourage you to take a step back and focus on your own well-being. Mental health struggles can affect anyone at any time, and seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

CHI is here for you every step of the way. We offer a full range of behavioral health services with compassionate, highly trained psychiatrists and therapists ready to support you in your time of need. Whether you or someone you know is experiencing stress, anxiety, depression



or any other mental health concerns, our team is dedicated to helping you navigate these challenges. We want you to know that your mental health matters, and there is always hope.

This Suicide Prevention Month, let's break the stigma and start the conversation. Mental health is health, and it's time we all make it a priority. Please don't hesitate to reach out and schedule an appointment with our behavioral health specialists at [chisouthfl.org/appointment-requests](https://chisouthfl.org/appointment-requests).

Together, we can build a healthier, more compassionate community. Thank you for being an essential part of CHI, and for allowing us to be a part of your journey.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Blake Hall".

Blake Hall



# Community Health in Focus: CHI Celebrates National Health Center Week



*Dr. Elizabeth Philippe checks a patient's heart during School Physical Day.*

CHI celebrated National Health Center Week in August with a series of festivities and events across all health centers. National Health Center Week highlights the value and importance of community health centers nationwide, like CHI, that are providing high-quality health care to those in need. Community health centers care for 31 million people in America with nearly

1,500 health centers in the United States. CHI is among the largest, helping to improve the health and well-being of medically underserved communities, regardless of income or background. It hosted several events throughout the week to give back to patients and the South Miami-Dade and Monroe communities. The organization also celebrated its staff for their unwavering commitment to its patients.

The week kicked off on August 3rd with School Physical Day as parents brought their children into several CHI centers for health physicals ahead of the 2024-2025 school year. Hundreds of students received comprehensive health screenings, including vision, hearing and general wellness checks, to make sure they are ready for the upcoming academic year. The event is aimed to promote student well-being and academic success.

The events continued with Healthcare for the Homeless Day at Homestead's Soup Kitchen. CHI was happy to join efforts with the company that serves over 1,000 free meals a month in Homestead. Together, they provided hot meals, care packages, health screenings and scheduled appointments for the homeless. "As a community health center, we have a responsibility to make sure everyone is healthy and receiving the care that

they need,” said Blake Hall, CHI President and CEO.

Agricultural Worker Health Day took place at Costa Farms, where CHI’s outreach, dental team and volunteers delivered healthcare services to agricultural workers in Redland, Florida. The teams conducted screenings for blood pressure and sugar levels, along with dental services. Agricultural workers put in daily long hours that directly benefit our community, and yet they are often medically underserved. That’s why CHI ensures they have access to care regardless of status or insurance.

“We recognize the tireless efforts of agricultural workers who sustain our communities,” said Director for Migrant Health Services and Outreach, Eunice Hines. “It is a privilege to provide them with essential supplies, make a connection with them and let them know that we are here to address their health and social needs. Their well-being is very important to us.”



*CHI volunteers set up utensils for the homeless at the Homestead Soup Kitchen on Healthcare for the Homeless Day.*



*President and CEO, Blake Hall, and CHI’s Executive Staff stand with Congresswoman Maria Elvira Salazar and Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay community leaders on Stakeholder Appreciation Day.*

Later in the week, CHI hosted Stakeholder Appreciation Day where political officials, such as Congresswoman Maria Elvira Salazar, Florida Senator Alexis Calatayud and other community leaders, visited Doris Ison Health Center to learn more about CHI’s services. The legislators presented CHI with a proclamation for National Health Center Week and a special certificate of congressional recognition. These visits build a relationship with lawmakers that will ultimately help CHI deliver top-notch healthcare to the community.

Throughout the week, CHI also showed appreciation to both patients and staff. After their wellness visits, patients received small gifts for their loyalty at all CHI locations. The staff was recognized for their commitment to providing excellent care.



# A Legacy of Care: CHI Veteran Dr. Tomas Lang Reflects on 60 Years in Dentistry



*President and CEO, Blake Hall (left), and Director of Dental Services, Dr. Sheri Watson-Hamilton (right), presented Dr. Tomas Lang (center) with a commemorative clock for his more than 20 years of service at CHI.*

As a young boy in Managua, Nicaragua, Dr. Tomas Lang suffered from horrible tooth pain due to multiple cavities and a lack of proper dental care in his country. He thought to himself during those moments that he would never want another child or person to experience the pain that he felt and decided he would become a dentist. Dr. Lang did not know how he would accomplish this, but the thought of providing dental care to underserved communities motivated

him to chase his dreams. Decades later, as he celebrates his milestone 90th birthday, his dream has come true as he now retires after 60 years in dentistry and over 20 years at Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI).

Dr. Lang's dentistry journey began in Mexico City, Mexico, where he received his dental education at Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico. Since his chosen field was not offered in Nicaragua, Dr. Lang had to move away from home to

pursue his education. He remembers the struggle of moving to a new country and not knowing anyone.

"I was studying dentistry in English in Mexico. I had to learn the language at the same time," Dr. Lang said. "I would use a dictionary in class, it was very hard."

Born to a Chinese immigrant father and Nicaraguan mother, Dr. Lang's parents were his motivators during challenging times and inspired him to always go after his goals.

"I thank them every day for giving me the opportunity to pursue this career," he said. "They were the ones that pushed me to study and move to Mexico to get my education."

Once he received his degree, Dr. Lang moved to California where he practiced for 5 years before returning to Nicaragua to provide care to those in need. However, soon political unrest and war forced him to move to America for good. That's when the opportunity that changed his life came to him on a trip to Miami. A friend of his told him that there was an open position at CHI and recommended him to apply to the health center. Dr. Lang went for it.

"I filled out an application, left an email address only and returned to Nicaragua," he remembers. "One week later, they called me back for an interview. I did the interview in Miami and flew back home the same day."

Dr. Lang received an offer, and in two weeks he was working at CHI. He says that he knew CHI was for him the moment he did the interview. During his more than 20 years working at the organization, Dr. Lang has loved every minute of creating beautiful smiles for his patients and performing some of his favorite procedures like root canals and creating dentures.

**"I feel happy when I see a patient with their new dentures," he said. "Seeing them happy is very rewarding."**

Giving back to the community he serves is especially important to Dr. Lang. Over the years, he has given back to countless patients in need, at times even paying for their entire dental procedure and donating to CHI's Brick by Brick Foundation benefiting the Children's Crisis Center. Serving at CHI has been the highlight of his career, he said, and although retiring is a bittersweet feeling, he is proud of the work he has accomplished.

"I have mixed feelings about retiring," Dr. Lang said. "I know I need to be responsible with patients, especially at my age. It is better to go out feeling good! That really motivated me to retire."

As a father, grandfather and great-grandfather, Dr. Lang says he has no plans yet for his retirement. He just wants to spend time with his family and enjoy his free time.

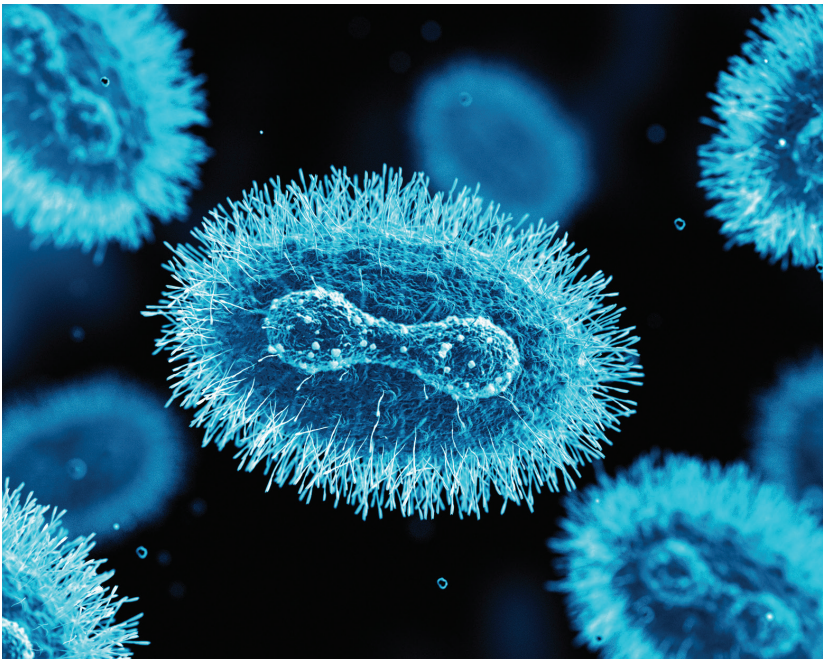


*Dr. Tomas Lang struts the hallway in his retirement sash on his 90th birthday.*



# New MPOX Variant Sparks Global Concern:

## CHI Offers Guidance on Prevention



*Mpox declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization.*

Mpox cases are rising in South Florida as a new variant outbreak happens overseas. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Mpox a public health emergency due to the increase in cases in Africa. The new variant, called Clade I, originated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and started spreading rapidly this year. The new variant has not reached Florida; but Clade II cases are on the rise again here. Previously known as Monkeypox, Mpox is a disease that causes painful rashes like blisters or pimples, fever, body aches and swollen lymph nodes. Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI) is ready to fight the spread of this disease, and CHI doctors are encouraging patients and the community to educate themselves.

CHI's Dr. Cheryl Holder offers answers and advice on how to keep yourself healthy.

### **How is the Clade I variant different from Clade II?**

Clade I started in Central Africa and is likely to cause severe disease, while Clade II originated in West Africa and is less likely to cause severe disease. Clade II numbers are currently rising in South Florida. So far this year in Miami-Dade County, there have been 48 cases and in Broward County, 23 cases.

### **How is Mpox being transmitted now?**

**Dr. Holder:** Close contact is causing the spread much more than sexual closeness. Before, it was spreading due to longer physical contact. Now, the contact does not need to be as intimate. You can get it from bedding, clothing and close contact with people who are in the beginning stages of the virus. Also, currently, transmission of the virus outside of Africa is travel-related. This is unlike Clade II, that passed from travel into the community and was then passed locally by other people. Right now, there are no cases of the new variant in the United States.



### **Why is Clade I being considered a public health emergency by WHO?**

**Dr. Holder:** It is an emergency because it is so much easier to spread than the 2022 strain, and officials want to contain it in Africa. To prevent the spread, they are vaccinating many people in the areas where the virus is prevalent. If you are going to be traveling to these countries that are affected, you should get vaccinated.

### **Who is the most affected?**

**Dr. Holder:** Previously, this disease was spreading among men who have sex with other men as well as those who have close and prolonged intimate contact. Now, it can be transmitted among anyone, and many children are affected because they play closely and share the same bed. It is no longer just skin to skin but can be transmitted by contact with infected clothes and bedding.

### **If you have been exposed to the disease, what should you do?**

**Dr. Holder:** See your doctor. If you know you have been in an area with high transmission rates like places in Central Africa, please get checked.

### **Any misconceptions we should be aware of?**

**Dr. Holder:** That Mpox is out in the open in the community and that you can catch it just by trying on any clothes. People should know that Clade I is not in the United States, and it is travel-related. So be informed and know your risks, especially if you do not know the travel history of the people you are coming into contact with. This virus is not transmitted by bugs, and it is not in the air. It requires you to physically be in contact with someone who has it. Don't be afraid, talk to your doctor and use credible sources like the CDC and WHO for your health information.



*Dr. Cheryl Holder, CHI family medicine physician*

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# Our Compassionate Team Serving You



**Dawn Brown-Smith**

*Dawn Brown-Smith started working at CHI in 2020.*

Dawn Brown-Smith is a Patient Financial Services Specialist in the Behavioral Health department at the Doris Ison Health Center. Her duties include welcoming patients, checking them in for appointments, and scheduling future visits. Brown-Smith interacts with many patients daily, and her main goal is to get them in front of their doctors promptly. She takes pride in minimizing wait times, which reassures her that they are getting the care they need. Her journey with CHI began when she accompanied a friend to an appointment and was impressed by the facility's cleanliness and efficiency. That experience sparked her interest in working for CHI, and soon after, she applied and got the job. Born in Jamaica, Brown-Smith moved to the U.S. in 2018 and has since made Miami her home with her two children. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with family, cooking and reading.



**Lisette Machado**

*Lisette Machado began her CHI journey in 2022.*

Lisette Machado is an Ultrasound Technician at Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI). Her career began 20 years ago in Cuba, before moving to America in 2011 and joining CHI in 2022. Machado performs ultrasounds on expectant mothers and enjoys being part of special moments in her patients' lives. She values working for CHI, an organization that provides healthcare to everyone, regardless of income or status. Machado feels a strong connection to her patients, many of whom are underserved minorities, and takes pride in ensuring the health of both mothers and babies. She also cherishes the bonds she shares with her coworkers, describing the work environment as family-like. Outside of work, Machado studies ultrasound images and refines her skills. On weekends, she enjoys relaxing and spending time with her family.