

CHA News Release

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CONTACT:

Jan Emerson-Shea
(916) 552-7516 | (916) 804-0663 – Cell
@jemersonshea – Twitter

“Homeless Guardians” Digital Series Shines Spotlight on Quiet, Compassionate Care Provided by California Hospitals

Frontline Caregivers Touch Thousands of Californians Experiencing Homelessness Every Year

SACRAMENTO (January 28, 2020) — Every day, a small army of women and men rise to help meet the needs of Californians experiencing homelessness. These are people who work at California’s hospitals: social workers, case managers, nurses, doctors and others. They are the frontline caregivers who dedicate themselves to tend to those in greatest need — those individuals who don’t know where they will sleep or when their next meal will be.

The compassionate care that these health care professionals provide to the most vulnerable among us is highlighted in a new digital series — [“Homeless Guardians”](#) — now available online at www.HomelessGuardians.com. The series is a special project of the California Hospital Association and Our Health California, a community of more than 1 million Californians dedicated to advancing access to quality, affordable care for all Californians.

The first two chapters of the series — highlighting the work of social workers Brynn Jones at Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento and Tonya Zelaya at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego — is now available online. Two additional chapters, featuring caregivers in Los Angeles and San Francisco, will come online within the next few weeks.

In simplest terms, Jones’ job is to help people with needs beyond the injuries that can be

— more —

mended in the hospital's emergency department. Things like helping the homeless access basic mental health counseling, connections to short-term homeless shelters, and often, just a sandwich or a pair of clean underwear. While these seemingly small gestures may be minuscule in the face of a crisis affecting some 134,000 people across the state — an estimated 25% of the nation's total homeless population — to Jones success means that those she has cared for have found secure footing and are healthy.

"Homelessness is like a glass of milk on the table that keeps spilling over," Jones says, "I'm over here on the floor wiping up the milk, but the glass keeps overflowing so I have to keep wiping."

Zelaya, an immigrant from Guyana and the daughter of two nurses, says her job is to inject reality into the conversation about how patients will tend to their needs after they've been treated at the hospital. Part of Zelaya's reality check-list is to determine whether temporary shelters will allow devices for breathing treatments, or where homeless individuals can go for follow-up care and stable access to nutritious food. Zelaya knows that if these questions aren't adequately answered before a homeless person is discharged, there's a good chance they will end up right back in the hospital.

"Each patient is unique because of their unique circumstances," Zelaya says. "Our focus is on ensuring they can stabilize and recover after they leave the hospital."

Jones and Zelaya are just two of the thousands of caring and compassionate health care professionals across California who work tirelessly — day in and day out — helping to protect vulnerable and disenfranchised people experiencing homelessness. They are the *"Homeless Guardians"* of the Golden State.

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