

# Food Pharmacies and Healthy Food Prescriptions « Food Bank News

## Food Pharmacies and Healthy Food Prescriptions

By Marcia Silva, on August 22nd, 2015



*Food is medicine. It provides the nutrients we all need to stay healthy. That's why we're partnering with healthcare providers to ensure that everyone has access to the nutritious food they need to thrive. We are working with our longtime partner Samaritan House, located in San Mateo County, on an exciting new "food pharmacy" pilot. The pharmacy will fill physicians' "prescriptions" for healthy food, free of charge, for 200 low-income, uninsured patients with diabetes at [Samaritan House Free Clinic of Redwood City](#). [Sequoia Healthcare District](#) is generously underwriting the pilot program. We sat down with Dr. Jason Wong, Medical Director at Samaritan House Free Clinic of Redwood City, and Bart Charlow, Samaritan House CEO. What are some of the challenges your patients face in terms of accessing healthy food? What impact does that have on their health?*

Jason: The challenges of accessing healthy food include barriers related to cost, culture, transportation, and knowledge. Specifically for diabetes, which is a very diet-sensitive disease, these barriers lead to poorer control of diabetes and poorer health outcomes and complications.

Bart: When you're on a tight budget, you'll eat whatever food is filling and cheap. Unfortunately, that food tends to be a bit of a nutritional wasteland. The clinic's patients often experience not just temporary hunger, but food insecurity—the enormous physical and psychological impact of not knowing where your next meal comes from. That

can have huge, long-term health consequences.

Jason: Eating habits formed by food insecurity are adopted by the entire family. We hope that the food pharmacy will help enable parents to model healthy eating habits for their children.

*What is the typical content of a bag you'd prescribe to your patients?*

Jason: We'll work with a nutritionist to develop the exact contents, but in general a bag would consist of a variety of proteins, complex carbohydrates, and fresh produce. The bags would also include educational material about diabetes, recipes, and healthy lifestyle changes.

*The food pharmacy will serve patients with diabetes, are there plans to extend these efforts to include other conditions?*

Jason: In the future, we might consider other diet-sensitive diseases like high blood pressure.

***\*\*\*Stay tuned for more information on this exciting pilot!***

