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# DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Healing the mind

### CARL CLARK EMBRACES POSITIVE APPROACH TO MENTAL ILLNESS

BY RACHAEL LONG  
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Carl Clark never planned to be the CEO of anything, but today he's the president and CEO of the Mental Health Center of Denver.

As a young man, Clark was interested in anything that got him outdoors, so he studied zoology in college. But his focus changed to psychiatry after his dad's bipolar disorder diagnosis.

"I feel like we got lucky, my family, that my dad got access to [mental health] services, because not a lot of people do," Clark said. "In fact, right now, of all the people in the United States that are dealing with mental health or an addiction problem, only two out of five are actually getting help."

Clark said he followed his passion and threw himself into each new job as it came along. He started at MHCD as a staff psychiatrist, then became medical director before stepping into his role as CEO in 2000 and president in 2014.

Under his leadership, MHCD has accrued several awards, including the National Council Excellence in Service Innovation Award in 2010 and 2011 and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Science and Service Award in 2009 and 2010.

It's become his mission to create a culture of well-being at MHCD, and Clark said employees are tested to find their strengths—instead of their weaknesses—to encourage a "focus on what they're naturally good at so they can be terrific at it."

"For me, the joy comes out of having a really fantastic team of people that can accomplish things together," Clark said.

It's not just the staff at MHCD who benefit from the culture of well-being, Clark said. Patients are treated differently today than they were before the turn of the century.

In 1999, there was a shift in the way psychologists and mental health care professionals studied the brain. Instead of looking at what can go wrong with the brain, Clark says psychologists now look for what can go right.

This new way of seeing patients is called positive psychology, and it's the foundation on which Clark has built the MHCD patient-care regimen.

All patients at MHCD receive a different level of care based on their needs, Clark said, which is then followed up by the regular measurement of

**Dr. Carl Clark is the Mental Health Center of Denver president and CEO. His office is currently undergoing a remodel.**



their progress with specialized "recovery instruments." Developed at MHCD, the instruments gauge a patient's progress based on the viewpoint of both clinician and patient.

As patients get better, Clark said their treatment levels change, allowing the center to see more people.

This process of care is so unique that Clark said people come from all over the country and different parts of the world to see what MHCD does differently.

"There's all this unmet need in the community, and we're always having to put on our innovation hats to think about that," Clark said.

Helping those who struggle with mental health problems is not without its challenges, as Clark has found when dealing with insurance companies and health plans.

Clark said a bias exists in health care between things that are easily understood versus things that are not. He gave the example that a surgeon is typically well paid because health plans have no problem understanding when a person's body needs to be repaired. The mind, he said, is different.

Despite industry challenges, Clark said his job is "so gratifying" because he gets to see people overcome their own obstacles and get their lives back on track.

"This is really great work to be able to do," Clark said. "I mean, when you see somebody who has had

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**Education:** Medical School, University of Oklahoma, in 1982; Psychiatry at University of Colorado

**Favorite charitable organization:** MHCD, of course, Project Angel Heart — helps people get access to food, helps people with a wide range of illnesses, can modify the food for specific health problems. They've helped a lot of MHCD folks.

something happen in their life and things are not going well, to be able to see them sort of get their life to where they want it to be, that's just like, the best."