



# Celebrating 50 years of community health at Country Doctor

**We at Country Doctor are tremendously proud to carry on a legacy that dates back 50 years—to the tumultuous times of 1970-1971—and Seattle’s community activists and the Vietnam anti-war movement.**

While the 1960s were a turbulent time nationally, 1970 might have been even more turbulent locally in Seattle. The Vietnam war was raging, Boeing layoffs and unemployment were decimating the city, a 10-lane freeway was about to be built through the diverse Central District, and thousands of young people had a lot to say about all of it.

Four of those young people—Elizabeth Nucci, Fred ‘Gino’ Gianola, Linda McVeigh, and Tom Byers—would walk into this time as radical anti-war activists. Less than a year later, they’d walk out, co-founders of Country Doctor and leaders in the quiet movement of providing health care as an embodiment of social justice.

## **The Seattle Liberation Front**

The four met through an organization called the Seattle Liberation Front (SLF). “The SLF was a very large, loose group of anyone doing any kind of social justice,” says co-founder Linda McVeigh, an anti-war activist who became Country Doctor’s longest-serving Executive Director (1984-2017). Ever since a 1919 union strike had shut down the city, Seattle had been known as an activist hotspot. When the Vietnam war was raging, many young people flocked to Seattle to join the SLF.

*Continued on next page*

# Timeline

## January 1970

Michael Lerner starts teaching at UW

## February 17, 1970

SLF protest at the King County courthouse

## Spring 1970

Gino Gianola and Elizabeth Nucci meet at teach-in

## May 1970

SLF protest on I-5

## August 1970

Tom Byers indicted for SLF protest

## September 1970

Linda McVeigh arrives in Seattle

## September 1970

Founders meet with Black Panthers

## October-November 1970

Day Street Group goes door-to-door in Capitol Hill, soliciting needs from their neighbors

## January-March 1971

Set up clinic in church

## April 16, 1971

The 'Boeing Bust' billboard goes up at SeaTac: "Will the last person leaving SEATTLE -- Turn out the lights?"

## April 17, 1971

Country Doctor opens door of first clinic at abandoned firehouse

## Celebrating 50 years (continued from page 1)

"The SLF was very, very powerful," adds Country Doctor co-founder and first Executive Director Tom Byers, a public consultant and former deputy mayor of Seattle. As an SLF protester, Tom had been indicted for conspiracy as part of a protest against the student killings by National Guard at Kent State, but, "A number of us—including those who started the clinic—started to think there had to be more than street marches and protests."

Two of those people who were ready with the health care passion and knowledge were Fred 'Gino' Gianola and Elizabeth Nucci. Gianola, a Seattle native, had just returned from a tour as a medic in Vietnam. At the time, he'd been disillusioned seeing ICUs filled with "especially black, brown and poor white," people, he says. (Soon after he helped start Country Doctor, Gianola went on to graduate from one of University of Washington's first Physician Assistant classes, teach in the program for decades, and obtained a master's degree in bioethics in his 60s.)

Gianola met Elizabeth Nucci at a UW teach-in led by the radical philosophy professor Michael Lerner (who later founded the progressive Jewish interfaith magazine Tikkun). Nucci has since had a multi-decade career as a long-time health care advocate (especially for women and children), but she was already working at a hospital and interested in health care.

While hundreds joined break-out groups around politics or the environment, Gianola and Nucci joined just a handful of people—including Becky Jones and Carol Nelson, two other activists instrumental in the founding of Country Doctor—interested in health care.

**IT WAS IN THAT TEACH-IN CIRCLE WHEN THE IDEA THAT BECAME COUNTRY DOCTOR WAS BORN.**





Where it all started:

# The Day Street Collective

One of the principles of the Seattle Liberation Front was the 'collective', a formal arrangement set up for activists to support one another. Many of these collectives formed communal houses, including the founders of Country Doctor. In fact, they protested against the forces that undermined the soul of Seattle in their house's very location.

In the diverse Central District, the Department of Highway Transportation was about to tear down houses in the path of a planned ten-lane I-90 freeway extension. The Country Doctor founders arranged to rent one of these house for well under \$100 a month. In one of their first wins, partly due to the SLF and Day Street Collective's efforts the interstate's footprint became far smaller than the original plans, preserving much of the neighborhood.

People had donated paint cans, so they all painted the house "red, trimmed in marigold yellow with lime green and purple," Elizabeth remembers. "It looked like a circus tent. The neighborhood said, 'Who are these people and what are they doing?'"

"We called our collective Cacophony," Tom says. "We'd get a job, bring home the money and share it." Elizabeth Nucci worked at Firwood Hospital, Gino Gianola was a cast technician at Seattle Children's, and Tom Byers worked construction.

Soon thereafter, Linda McVeigh arrived from Cornell University. When Gino first met Linda, she was working on the repurposed mail truck she'd driven out from Cornell: "All I saw were her feet sticking out from under the truck's engine."

For several months, they jointly cared for three children of a former collective member, learning the value of responsibility in a very personal way that bonded them even tighter together while starting Country Doctor. "The beauty of living in a collective is that we could collaborate," Elizabeth adds. "Individuals would take turns working. That's how we supported the household. The rest of us could work 24/7 -- or close to it -- devoted to organizing the clinic."

Once the idea of a community clinic was decided upon, the founders set out to make it a reality, including getting supplies and finding a location.

"Folks like Dr Green [founder of the Free Clinic who helped both Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor get their starts], Elmer [Dixon, co-founder of the Seattle Black Panthers and Carolyn Downs] and Bernie Whitebear of the Seattle Indian Health Board guided us," Byers says, "including to Capitol Hill, which had been historically redlined." It was also home to many of the 70,000 newly unemployed from Boeing, now without health insurance.

So the Day Street Collective put on their sturdiest shoes. They went door-to-door in Capitol Hill. They held a small community meeting with maybe a dozen neighbors. By the third meeting, over 70 neighbors showed up, including several medical personnel willing to donate their time and services.

Within months, the founders and dozens of their supporters were giving inoculations in the basement of a local church. "I think there were more volunteers than patients," Byers remembers about those first days.

At the same time, they were learning the nitty-gritty of how to run a community health clinic -- procuring medical supplies, organizing their myriad volunteers, and learning the decidedly unsexy but dire importance of sterile environments or refrigeration. "We all just worked and worked and worked," says McVeigh. "We had no life outside of Country Doctor."

WE HAD TO HAVE THE PRAGMATISM NOT JUST THE  
IDEALISM TO DO WHAT WE DID.  
BUT I NEVER THOUGHT WE  
COULDN'T DO IT.  
- ELIZABETH NUCCI

## The last horse-powered firehouse in Seattle

Tom and Elizabeth walked the streets of Capitol Hill, chancing upon an abandoned fire station. Tom Byers figured a historic location was the perfect spot, since the city couldn't tear it down. "It was the last fire station to have horses," Gino recalls.

Tom talked to the city and created an exchange: free rent in exchange for providing health care. And in April of 1971, less than nine months after the Day Street collective, Country Doctor opened its doors. Each of the founders has fond memories of that time, and how much it took from the entire community to get it up and running.

"We were all so busy with our different roles: supplies, construction, details, getting samples," says Gino Gianola, "It was a big adrenaline rush to see it all come to fruition."

"It was never just the four of us," says Elizabeth Nucci. "Dozens of dozens of people helped us -- Becky Jones, Carol Nelson, Fred, Gary, Bob, Amber, Dr John Green..."



**"Our collective couldn't have set up [Country Doctor] without the people who stepped forward"**

Tom Byers

**"One person can make a difference. People working together have a much more powerful impact"**

Linda McVeigh



# Getting By With a Little Help From Our Friends

## Carolyn Downs and the early Black Panther connection

In a poetic coincidence, the clinic that became Carolyn Downs was one of Country Doctor's most instrumental supporters 18 years before the two clinics officially joined forces.

When the Black Panthers set up the Sydney Miller clinic -- which was renamed after Carolyn Downs in 19xx -- in 1968-1970, it was under extraordinary circumstances. The Seattle Panthers were being targeted by police and had received bomb threats. In other cities, several Panthers had been assassinated. And yet, the Sydney Miller clinic -- located in the Panthers' headquarters -- was successfully serving hundreds of patients. Gino Gianola remembers going to the Sydney Miller clinic one

time in 1971 to get advice from Elmer Dixon -- and help fill sandbags.

Even under those circumstances, the clinic helped the founders of Country Doctor in countless ways, Byers recalls, "They shared medicines, advice, even physicians."

It was Elmer Dixon who'd suggested going door-to-door in Capitol Hill. "Elmer said you can't help your community until you speak to them directly," says Byers. "So we went out and spoke to them directly."

"They reminded us that if we didn't go to the people that we hoped to serve nothing would get accomplished," Nucci adds.

**"We wouldn't have existed if we hadn't had that [Black Panther/Carolyn Downs] alliance."**

— Linda McVeigh  
*co-founder and former Executive Director*

## The Country Doctor rambles

A question many Country Doctor patients (and staff!) have about the clinic is where did it get its name. The answer is as quintessentially Country Doctor as it gets.

This was around the time the SLF was demonstrating against the I-90 ripping the Central District apart -- where they'd formed their collective to stop the expansion -- and the collective had become close with their neighbors, all from extremely different walks of life, nationalities, backgrounds and ages.

"One day we were sitting in front of the house on Day Street, listening to Bob Dylan," remembers Linda McVeigh. They heard the song Love Minus Zero:

"Country Doctor! That's it!"

Linda remembers them all lighting up, "We wanted to be as integral and committed to our community as a country doctor is. Whether our patients could barter or if they had nothing, we wanted to be there for them like the country doctor was."

## Love Minus Zero By Bob Dylan

My love she speaks like silence,  
Without ideals or violence,  
She doesn't have to say she's faithful,  
Yet she's true, like ice, like fire.

...

The bridge at midnight trembles  
The Country Doctor rambles

# HIV/AIDS

In the 1980s, a very different mood settled upon Country Doctor. "Capitol Hill was the geographic heart of the Seattle gay community," Linda McVeigh remembers. "And we all realized at the same time; a number of Country Doctor's gay patients were dying -- and with weird, bizarre symptoms."

While other clinics, doctors and hospitals turned away HIV-positive patients out of fear (Gino Gianola remembers a time when no one was treating HIV-positive patients), Country Doctor became the heart of fighting the AIDS epidemic in Seattle. McVeigh says, "CDCHC naturally became the place people impacted by HIV (especially the low-income or uninsured) sought health care."

At one point in the mid 1980s, so many patients at Country Doctor were dying, McVeigh hired a grief counselor to work with staff. McVeigh says, "Because of our models of care [patient advocates, integrated mental health, etc], many people are involved with each patient."

At the same time Gino Gianola was working in Washington DC at the National Institute of Health on cancer. He started seeing gay patients with a very rare form of cancer, Kaposi Sarcoma. He even consulted his colleague -- a man named Dr. Anthony Fauci -- in infectious diseases.

Not long afterwards, Gino returned to Seattle and did some work with Country Doctor again. "Country Doctor was the only clinic in town that saw HIV patients. Patients came to Seattle from across the region just to get care at Country Doctor." Gino says, "It was such a sense of relief when meds started working."

Under Linda's leadership, Country Doctor applied for and received federal funding. "Linda listened to the board, 51% of which were community members," Gino says. "Country Doctor had a HIV pilot program a year before the Ryan White Foundation was established."

Linda, who was recently 'sainted' by the gay organization the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence' for her leadership during the HIV pandemic, is incredibly humble about this time, but even she admits that the standard of care at clinics with large numbers of AIDS patients "led to better outcomes, including increased life expectancy."

# The Legacy of Country Doctor

Country Doctor was the birthplace of many policies that have affected patients, but policy, health care and politics in not only Seattle, but Washington and the entire United States.

One such program was the Patient Advocate program, a very personal mission for the founders. Tom says. "We started the Patient Advocate (PA) program when we realized doctors need help listening to their patients."

Several of the original founders and volunteers had received substandard care or met with unempathetic doctors. At one point, an uninsured SLF member who was very sick got turned away from treatment at a hospital. The Day Street collective rallied around her. Literally. They held an impromptu sit-in at the hospital, even calling the media. The woman got the treatment she needed, potentially saving her life.

The PAs did things like take blood pressure and patients' vital signs but they providing a soft landing for patients, especially vulnerable folks who'd been marginalized from the health care system. "The PA was a way to translate," says Elizabeth.

McVeigh and Byers estimate around two dozen Patient Advocates from the early years went on to med school.

The earliest volunteers also continued to make a difference, many in government positions for decades. "Those volunteer docs and lab techs?" says Byers. "Some of them became permanent employees of the community health system for 40 years."

One of the first clinics set up at Country Doctor was the women's clinic, and women and children were -- as they are now -- always a priority. Nucci says, "Midwifery started in Seattle at Country Doctor." Gianola personally delivered 100 healthy babies, and thousands of women and children got care, whether they had insurance or not. "Ten thousand babies have been born healthier because of Country Doctor," estimates McVeigh.

As it is now, social justice was a founding principle at Country Doctor, and it got the clinic noticed across the country.

"One day [in 1973], we got a call from Wounded Knee," Gianola remembers. "They wanted to know; did anyone have combat experience."

Gianola soon headed to the Sioux reservation in South Dakota, where he treated members of the American Indian Movement who were under siege for 71 days from government troops.

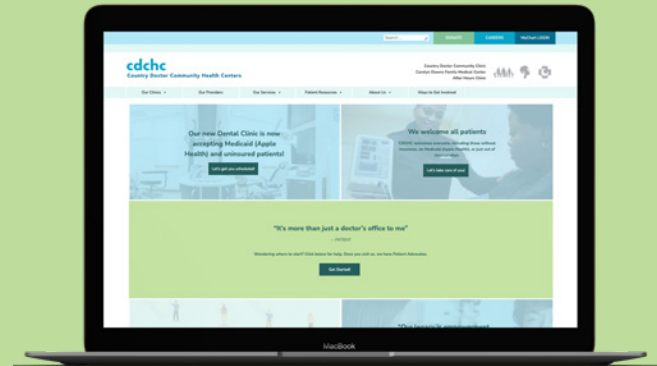
The clinic also became the de facto medic station for protests around Seattle, from the 1970s until today.



SAVE THE DATE FOR THE  
Come Together Dinner  
APRIL 23, 2022

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NEW WEBSITE!

[cdchc.org](https://cdchc.org)



“You can’t provide good health care without respecting and dignifying the whole person.”

— Linda McVeigh, Country Doctor co-founder and Executive Director, 1984-2017

To support Country Doctor’s legacy of fighting for justice and equity through community activism and respectful health care for another 50 years and beyond, please contact us about donating or writing us into your will.

For more information, contact Development Director Michael L. Craig at [mlcraig@cdchc.org](mailto:mlcraig@cdchc.org) or 206-299-1614.



COUNTRY DOCTOR  
COMMUNITY CLINIC



CAROLYN DOWNS  
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AFTER HOURS  
CLINIC

COUNTRY DOCTOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

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COUNTRY DOCTOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS’ clinics serve all patients with compassionate, comprehensive care, regardless of their ability to pay. As a nonprofit healthcare provider, we provide a warm and welcoming healthcare home to members of our community who live at disproportionately higher risk of chronic and life-threatening illness due to racism, discrimination and other systems of oppression. We treat each person’s unique medical, mental health, and dental needs in a safe and supportive environment.

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