



## HARBOR COMMUNITY CLINIC

### NEWS

#### SPRING 2008

Harbor Community Clinic, a resource for healthcare for low-income, indigent, or uninsured individuals and families in the Harbor Area, has served San Pedro, Wilmington, Harbor City, Lomita and the Palos Verdes Peninsula since 1970. The mission of Harbor Community Clinic, formerly known as Harbor Free Clinic, is to provide primary and preventive medical care to area residents who are unable to meet the cost of such services on their own. We have occupied several sites in San Pedro, moving to larger facilities as the need warranted. Our Main (Adult) Clinic has been located at 593 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Street (at Grand Avenue) in San Pedro since 2004, where we have 6 exam rooms and 2 mental health counseling rooms in 7,800 square feet. A separate Pediatric Clinic with 3 exam rooms is housed in a County-owned building at 731 S. Beacon Street, where the space for this use has been donated to HCC by the Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe. In 2007 we provided 15,600 patient encounters /medical visits to 4,200 adults and almost 2,300 children and youth.

Our Executive Director / CEO, Michele Ruple, has been leading the Harbor Community Clinic since 2004. She holds a B.A. in Psychology from UCLA and has over 29 years experience managing medical clinics in the Los Angeles area. She is responsible for the day-to-day overall management of both clinics, oversees fundraising, and works with the Board of Directors to develop strategies for the long-term success of the clinics. Robert Nelson, Controller, has worked in financial management positions at nonprofit organizations in Long Beach and the Harbor Area for over 10 years. We now have a highly qualified and professional medical and medical support staff in place to take care of the needs of the many patients we see on a daily basis. They include two physicians, two nurse practitioners with advanced degrees, and a Physician's Assistant who is also a licensed cytotechnologist.

In 2006 we were designated a Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC) Look Alike, gaining formal recognition as a safety net provider of primary care services in an underserved urban community. This enables us to see and treat Medi-Cal and Medi-Cal HMO patients and to receive reimbursement from the State and managed care agencies for these services.

The healthcare climate in California is one that requires solutions such as community clinics to serve uninsured people. The healthcare system in Southern California is seriously overburdened with uninsured patients, resulting in a crisis situation, according to many experts. *The Los Angeles Times* said in September 2007 that nearly two dozen private hospitals in Los Angeles and Orange Counties are in "dire financial straits and in danger of bankruptcy or closure." The article puts responsibility for the overcrowding and shutdown of public facilities on an increasing load of uninsured and low-income patients and says the number of uninsured patients visiting private hospitals, particularly in poor areas, has increased by one-third in Los Angeles County since 2002. At the same time, California's Medi-Cal

program reimburses hospitals at one of the lowest rates in the country. Since 1996, more than 50 community hospitals in Southern California have closed, as well as 10 emergency rooms in Los Angeles County.<sup>1</sup>

As health insurance becomes increasingly unaffordable to low-income families, and more and more Los Angeles area medical centers are severely impacted by too many uninsured patients, pressure increases on community health clinics such as Harbor Community Clinic to provide care for its neighbors. Harbor Community Clinic gives low-income and uninsured local residents a “medical home” that can greatly improve their health and well-being and lessens the burden on already overwhelmed local emergency rooms, saving taxpayer dollars.

According to a research brief published by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research (August 2007)<sup>2</sup>

- Uninsured persons are less likely to have a usual source of care;
- Among the uninsured, 40.2% reported having no usual source of care (as opposed to only 7.1 % of insured people who reported having no usual source of care);
- Uninsured individuals were less likely to have a primary care provider, have a lower probability of vaccine use or check-ups, and were more likely to delay seeking recommended follow-up care;
- Having a usual source of care has a considerable impact on access and utilization of healthcare service, independent of insurance status;
- The existence of a usual source of healthcare (a “medical home”) has been linked to improved health status and outcomes.

Harbor Community Clinic exists to be that medical home for indigent, low-income and uninsured people who cannot afford the cost of preventive healthcare services or medical care on their own.

The need for accessible healthcare services in the Harbor Area is great and our facilities have been utilized to maximum capacity. In 2007 wait times for non-emergency appointments at HCC were running up to 2 weeks. Because the ability to serve as many local residents as possible is so important, HCC decided to renovate the clinic and designated certain underutilized spaces within the facility that could be re-modeled to add 5 more exam rooms and an additional room for mental health counseling.

This project was funded in part by L.A. Care’s Robert E. Tranquada M.D. Health Care Safety Net Award to Harbor Community clinic that will benefit low income, uninsured residents of Los Angeles County. <http://www.lacare.org/index.html>. L.A. Care’s grant comprises half of the construction money needed and we have hired an architect to draw up plans for the renovation that will begin in Summer 2008. We have also received \$50,000 from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation to fund operations of the newly expanded clinic.

We are continuing to fundraise to acquire the remaining needed money for this project. We have engaged a talented contract grant writer, Suzanne Ridgway, who has applied for seven additional grants directly related to the expansion project, as well as several more for ongoing support of the Don Knabe

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<sup>1</sup> Costello, Daniel, and Rosenblatt, Susannah, “Financial woes jeopardize area hospitals,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Roby, Dylan H., Kominski, Gerald F., Cameron, Meghan E., “Improving Access Through Health Insurance Coverage and Safety Net Expansion,” *Health Policy Research Brief*, Aug 2007, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

Pediatric Clinic. Suzanne has a B.A. in English from UCLA and has worked with several nonprofit social service agencies and arts organizations in Los Angeles and Orange County, winning more than \$300,000 in grants for both special projects and general operating support in the past two years. At present, several of HCC's pending grant proposals have been favorably reviewed, with encouraging site visits from program officers completed. Furnishings and equipment for the new exams rooms, such as exam tables, lamps, trays, and carts, have been donated by Operation USA ([www.operationusa.org](http://www.operationusa.org)) and by Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center. We will be hiring additional healthcare providers upon completion of the project in late 2008 to supplement our existing medical and medical support staff: two additional physicians, one physician's assistant, and two medical assistants.

The planned improvements will significantly increase our capacity to see patients. By adding 45% more room to deliver health services, we will be able to see nearly 1,900 more adult patients every year, have more ease in scheduling group and individual therapy sessions, and can facilitate care for disabled patients with widened doorways and remodeled bathrooms and service counters. Wait times for appointments will be reduced by as much as six days.

We are pleased we will be able to increase access to healthcare for the Harbor Area residents who rely on us. Most of our patients are employed, but are in low-wage, service or temporary jobs that do not offer health insurance benefits. For these people, Harbor Community Clinic may be their only option for healthcare services.

Executive Director Michele Ruple says, "There's a misconception that the uninsured are not working individuals . . . they are. They often perform some of the most dangerous jobs in the community or other essential services. But for whatever reason they are not provided insurance coverage by their employer. That's where HCC comes in . . . we are a safety net so these hard-working individuals can maintain their health and get needed medical care. Also, our patients are appreciative and grateful for the services we provide to them and their families. It is an honor to be a part of an agency which is committed to helping those in need."

On any given day we may

- Treat a local man for the flu, before it worsens and before it spreads to other family and community members;
- Provide a young woman with information to prevent sexually transmitted infections or unwanted pregnancy;
- Prescribe an antibiotic for a toddler with a painful ear infection;
- Provide counseling for a woman with an anxiety disorder that leaves her unable to cope with the everyday demands of her life;
- Provide a well baby visit to an infant or give a sports physical to a youngster who wants to play soccer;
- Provide a pap smear to a woman to screen for cervical cancer;

- Monitor the condition of a child with diabetes or make sure an asthmatic child has an inhaler;
- Give nutritional counseling to an expectant mother, so that she and her unborn baby get the best possible care for the long-term health of the child.

Without Harbor Community Clinic, low-income and uninsured residents would either go without these services or go to emergency rooms for urgent needs, taxing our already overburdened healthcare institutions. Our provision of services keeps our residents healthy and our community healthy.

We are grateful to the individuals, local businesses, foundations and agencies that fund Harbor Community Clinic and allow us to do our work. We are especially grateful to regular long-term supporters such as the Crail-Johnson Foundation, Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center, Blue Shield Foundation, The Boeing Employee Community Fund, and the Northrop Grumman Corporate Giving Program who have provided immensely valuable cash grants. Direct Relief ([www.directrelief.org](http://www.directrelief.org)) has donated hundreds of cases of medication.

Cash and in-kind donations from individuals, businesses and the community are always gratefully considered and accepted if appropriate.