



## HARBOR COMMUNITY CLINIC

### NEWS

#### WINTER 2009-2010

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 calendar year 2008 we served 1,458 children and youth and 3,712 adults (unduplicated) and provided 9,217 adult medical visits/encounters and 3,503 pediatric medical visits/encounters.

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 30 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 several physicians, 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 current economic recession has also brought many new patients to our doors who have had private providers and health insurance coverage in the past, but have lost jobs and health coverage in recent months. These people are an important new constituency we hope to serve with not only healthcare services, but referrals to other community resources to help them in their time of need.

The need for accessible healthcare services in the Harbor Area is great and our facilities have been utilized to maximum capacity. 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; we are re-modeling the facility to add 6 more exam rooms, a physician's consulting office and wing 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 to benefit low income, uninsured residents of Los Angeles County.

<http://www.lacare.org/index.html>. We also received \$75,000 from the Ahmanson Foundation, \$50,000 from the Weingart Foundation, and \$10,228 from Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center for

---

<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.

construction costs, and \$50,000 from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation to fund operations of the newly expanded clinic, as well as a pledge from the Max Factor Family Foundation for \$15,000 for new equipment and furnishings for exam rooms. 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.

A subcommittee of our volunteer Board of Directors is overseeing the construction project. Work has been going on in the two-story south side of the building, while patient services continue in exam rooms in the one-story north portion. The south side under construction will contain several exam rooms, and a Mental Health wing with its own entrance. The five new mental health counseling offices will allow us to expand our part time counseling program to a full-service program during the week days, with several psychologists available to local residents. The upstairs also contains a new Board/lunch room and full kitchen upstairs and an upstairs employee patio outside. Executive and accounting offices will also be moved upstairs. In December 2009 contractors are finishing the rough plumbing and electrical work on the south side of the building, which will be inspected this month, as will the mechanical and heating systems. Windows and stucco are scheduled to be done by the end of the year.

By February the south side will be complete; operations will move to that portion of the Clinic and work will begin in the north side, primarily more new patient exam rooms, laboratory and dispensary, to be finished by June 2010. New landscaping will complete the project next summer.

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 several additional grants directly related to the expansion project, as well as more for ongoing support of the Don Knabe 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 over \$1.2 million in grants for both special projects and general operating support for various clients in the past four years.

We have engaged a retired obstetrician/gynecologist who will supervise our prenatal program. Dr. Lee will initially work 4 hours a week until we have all of our exam rooms back in operation, then will work 16 hours a week. We will be able to serve the many local women who need pre-natal services up to 28 weeks. Other medical and medical support personnel will also be recruited in the coming months so that HCC can be fully staffed when the renovations are complete.

Also, next year we will completely re-vamp our Mental Health Counseling program, bringing in several part-time psychologists so that we can offer counseling services 5 days a week.

Long range plans for the future include additional enhancements at the Main Clinic, such as pursuing accreditation as an outpatient surgical center and building a suite there that could provide simple outpatient procedures for patients who currently have waits of up to a year for such a procedure if scheduled through Harbor General-UCLA.

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. We are also serving many formerly middle-class individuals families who are victims

of the economic recession, have lost jobs and health insurance coverage, and so have had to access our Clinic for the very first time, in order to get the healthcare they need.

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."

Michele hopes that, with the completion of the renovation project next summer, Harbor area residents will choose to make HCC their "medical home" when they need quality healthcare services.

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.

Our services keep 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.

#### HARBOR COMMUNITY CLINIC SUPPORTERS

L.A. Care

The Ahmanson Foundation

Boeing Employee Community Fund

Ralph M. Parsons Foundation

HCC

News, December 21, 2009

Page | 5

Max Factor Family Foundation  
Palos Verdes Junior Women's Club  
National Charity League, Peninsula Chapter  
Vons Foundation  
The California Wellness Foundation  
Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center  
Crail-Johnson Foundation  
Blue Shield of California Foundation  
Anonymous Donor  
CalNational Bank  
SA Recycling  
City of Rancho Palos Verdes  
Northrop Grumman Corporation  
AMWA American Women's Hospital Service  
Allcare

Operation U.S.A. ([www.operationusa.org](http://www.operationusa.org)) has donated furnishing and equipment and 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.

Thanks as well to our talented and dedicated volunteer Board of Directors for their service in guiding the Clinic through the past year: Dan Powers, Chairperson; Margaret Sullivan, Vice Chair; Rebecca Trani, Secretary; Linda Anderson; Terry Butera; Mike Lansing, Lonnie Gibbs; Alan Weinfeld; Richard Manzanares; Alex Levy; Gretchen Williams-Tostrup.