



## HARBOR COMMUNITY CLINIC

### NEWS

#### SPRING 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 had 6 exam rooms and 2 mental health counseling rooms in 7,800 square feet, prior to our 2010 renovation project that is still ongoing. 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 2009 we provided 10,724 medical visits/encounters to 4,335 adult patients and 4,462 pediatric medical visits/encounters to 1,631 unduplicated pediatric patients, including 400 patients under 5 years old.

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 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.

More and more working families are losing health plan coverage or are not offered health insurance through their jobs. The current recession has brought much higher unemployment rates to Los Angeles County in just the past year – 12.5% in January 2010. California's unemployment rate is now the fifth-highest in the nation. We are seeing a new group of patients at HCC; more white, middle class individuals who have lost their jobs and their health insurance coverage are appearing in our waiting room. With professionals and white-collar workers who previously had employer-provided or

employer-subsidized health insurance unable to afford individual or even COBRA continuation coverage, their families are uninsured. This consequence of the economic recession is contributing to ever-increasing numbers of low-income and uninsured children who need healthcare services in the Harbor area and point to a high level of need in the immediate future.

In addition, there are fewer and fewer medical facilities for low-income families to turn to with continual closures of hospitals, emergency rooms and other clinics. The 2007 shut-down of the King/Drew Medical Center in South Los Angeles, while not impacting HCC to a large degree, did cause more than 260 patients from the MLK area to seek out Harbor Community Clinic for medical care in 2008. Whenever a medical center closes, the remaining facilities and clinics in the area must absorb the patients and our dollars are stretched even further. The Association of Community Clinics projects a growth rate of almost 4% in its target population (the uninsured and publicly insured) between 2005 and 2015 (ACC Los Angeles County 330 Planning Report – June 2008, p.157). As this report was published before the major economic crisis of 2008, this estimate is almost certainly very conservative.

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>1</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

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<sup>1</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.

facility; we are re-modeling the facility to add six more exam rooms, a physician's consulting office and wing for mental health counseling. Our Prenatal Care program will expand its hours when the renovation is complete, and we will completely re-vamp our Psychological Counseling program to take advantage of the new Counseling Resource Center wing, bringing in several part-time licensed psychologists who will offer counseling five days a week.

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 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. While the heavy rains this winter delayed the project for a few weeks, windows have been now been installed and the building has passed a DWP inspection. Insulation and drywall will be installed soon. 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.

New services and programs are planned for the near future that will improve the health of area residents. We are also in discussions with Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center to partner with their pulmonary specialists in asthma screening of Harbor Area residents. HCC will accept referrals and provide patient education, medication and monitoring for asthma patients through a grant received by PLCM for this purpose.

Also through Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Institute and a grant given to the Vasek Polak Health Clinic (VPHC), HCC will be provided free of charge with a part-time eligibility worker who can reroll children in the Healthy Family and Healthy Kids programs to ensure they will have access to important primary and preventive healthcare as they develop.

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

The Weingart Foundation  
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. And welcome to our newest Board member, Ken Pleshek.