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La Clinica joins in work to improve health equity in region

La Clinica is part of a regional group formed this spring to improve the health and well-being of people throughout the community. The Health Care Coalition of Southern Oregon secured a three-year Oregon Health Authority grant to operate a Regional Health Equity Coalition. The group will bring together community organizations to examine health disparities among racially and ethnically diverse communities; people with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities; and low-income people.

“Research has shown that 60 percent of health outcomes are not related to health access or insurance but associated with socio-economic factors around housing, neighborhood, and access to healthy foods,” said La Clinica Development Director Maria Ramos Underwood, who is co-chair of the new coalition and consulted on the grant. “We have an opportunity here to improve the health of our community as a whole.”

The coalition plans a July 10 training and strategic thinking session and will show the PBS film series “Unnatural Causes,” which discusses health inequities, this summer. Learn more at facebook.com/hccso.

Center will ensure access for growing patient population

Helen’s world shifted the day she learned she would receive insurance through the Oregon Health Plan.

She hadn’t had coverage for five years, since she used up her savings paying premiums to an insurer who she said raised her rates when she was diagnosed with breast cancer and then canceled her insurance when she ran out of money.

“I’m having a mammogram Friday, my first one in five years,” she said. “I couldn’t even go to the doctor before. I can’t be more thankful.”

The Medford woman is among about 19,000 Jackson County residents newly insured by OHP this year and like many others has started care at La Clinica. The number of OHP patients assigned to La Clinica has doubled since November, and the organization’s medical practice has added 350 patients monthly this year.

These numbers led La Clinica leaders to a decision this spring to open a new health center in a high-need area of Medford next year. La Clinica Wellness Center, at 730 Biddle Road, will rise from the skeleton of Medford’s former post office distribution center. La Clinica plans 15 medical exam rooms and space for complementary health services such as acupuncture, nutrition, or physical therapy.

Even before it is open, La Clinica anticipates hiring several medical providers to address growing need within existing centers. The new center is anticipated to serve about 5,000 patients. Learn more at www.laclinicahealth.org/wellness.
Dentist once needed kinds of services she now provides

Daniela Diaz has vivid memories of the migrant health center where her grandmother would take her as a child.

“We were very poor,” she says, and while Daniela wasn’t sick often, her grandmother suffered from health issues that brought her to the clinic down the road from Phoenix elementary frequently.

Daniela Diaz didn’t know then that she wanted to work in health care, that she’d ever see southern Oregon as a permanent home, or that the little migrant health center would somehow play a role in her future. School, jobs in other fields, some serious soul searching, and more school had to come first. 

Working at a budding career in market research in Portland after college, she felt vaguely disillusioned—that, and a love of the time she spent at her dentist’s office. She remembers telling her boyfriend, whom she later married. “You want to hear something crazy? I think I want to be a dentist,” she recalls, laughing. “And he’s like, ‘What?'”

Her long road to actually doing that included multiple stints at health clinics dedicated to serving low-income people and a growing realization that this, finally, was the work that called to her.

In her interview with La Clinica staff last year, “From the questions they were asking me I could see how protective they were of their patients,” she says. “I really identify with being in the position of that patient."

Which is understandable; she once was. The migrant center she visited as a child eventually became La Clinica. La Clinica grew over the years to include dental care.

“As a child I never went to the dentist, and I think it’s because it was scary. I think if my grandmother was able to get dental care when she needed it, it would have made a difference."

Daniela Diaz moved from Mexico City to Oregon as a child, and she and her grandmother used services of a migrant health center that preceded La Clinica. Now she’s employed as a dentist at La Clinica’s Central Point Health Center.