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BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Crucial care a community gift

Clinica Esperanza / Hope Clinic



A VALUED SERVICE: The Clinica Esperanza/Hope Clinic in Providence provides free health care to the city's underserved population. Here, Dr. Zineb Benstitou examines Julio Martinez. PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

BY REBECCA KEISTER | Contributing Writer

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When the Clinica Esperanza/Hope Clinic was established eight years ago in the basement of a church, it was with the vision that a group of dedicated volunteers could help Rhode Island residents facing economic hardships receive crucial, preventative medical care.

That vision has carried the nonprofit to where it stands today: a walk-in health clinic that serves more than 2,500 patients each year.

"We are very excited, because this is our first time [winning a Business Excellence Award], and the work that we do is being acknowledged," said Carlos Juarez, clinic coordinator and executive director in training. "[This award] will increase the knowledge that we exist and hopefully get the word out that there's a need for organizations like this."

Still dependent on volunteers, Clinica Esperanza primarily provides preventative health care to residents of south Providence and west Providence, but also serves residents from as far away as Westerly and Block Island. About 40 to 50 patients are seen each week at the Valley Street clinic. Services include blood pressure and glucose screenings for patients who Juarez said sometimes haven't had a wellness check in several years.

"These are people who don't have insurance and don't have access to affordable health care," he said.

There are eight staff members at the clinic, but the organization's 250 volunteers include health care providers such as Dr. Anne S. De Groot, who serves as the clinic's volunteer medical and executive director. The clinic also has volunteer providers from Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island, Blackstone Valley Healthcare and medical students from the Warren Alpert Medical School at Brown University in Providence.

When patients need access to services the clinic cannot provide, volunteers are able to connect those patients to specialists through community collaborations.

Over the last five years, the clinic has treated 19,120 individual patients, conducted 13,573 continuity-of-care visits and seen 3,113 walk-in (non-urgent) care patients.

Though keeping the clinic volunteer based allows for low operational costs – the clinic reported that 6 percent of its overall grant and donation-funded income is used for administrative costs – funding continues to be a challenge.

The clinic runs on an annual budget of \$350,000. Volunteer doctors and nurses contribute more than \$100,000 in volunteer hours per year. The clinic reported that it receives more than \$300,000 each year in grants and in 2015 passed the \$1 million mark in grants received so far.

"There's a lot of organizations competing [for funding] that also have great programs," Juarez said. "A challenge is just getting people to actually know us by the work we do."

Juarez would like to allocate more money toward marketing the clinic and its programs in order to serve even more in-need residents. The clinic estimates that more than 50,000 Rhode Island residents remain uninsured, and that 38 percent of South Providence and West Providence residents are uninsured.

Of those residents, the clinic reports, about 80 percent earn less than \$15,000 per year and that some, including legalized immigrants who have lived in the United States less than five years, are not eligible for health care under the Affordable Care Act.

Juarez said that increased outreach could help reach those residents to get them into the clinic to see doctors who can treat chronic illnesses and help prevent other high-cost illnesses. •