

Orange County community unites around health access; forms an advocacy alliance

The community forum held last Saturday, August 22 at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish Hall led to a groundbreaking alliance. Organized by a group of local and regional stakeholders, including the Coalition of Orange County Community Clinics ("the Coalition"), Latino Health Access, Orange County Labor Federation, Orange County Congregation Community Organization, Lestonnac Free Clinic, VNCOC Asian Health Clinic, Korean Community Services, Health Care Council of Orange County, AARP and the Prevention Institute, the forum galvanized grass-root commitment to advocate for and ensure health access.

The forum entitled, "Orange County Health In Crisis: Community Health Centers At The Frontlines," led to a call for unity and deeper collaboration among community and religious leaders, social service organizations, labor unions, health advocacy groups, and local patient spokespersons.

Curtis Crocker, Alondra Campos, and Ninh Nguyen shared their most personal struggles to accessing healthcare, inspiring genuine compassion, especially from Ed Gerber, President of the Coalition Board of Directors, and Executive Director of Lestonnac Free Clinic.

"It is only through collaboration and compassion that we could, with our own efforts, address the growing community need," Mr. Gerber said.

This call for a local alliance among community clinics, faith-based groups, labor groups, community-based organizations and social service agencies was echoed repeatedly during the forum.

"A local alliance has formed several times in the past to advocate for the public's health," said Felix Schwarz, Executive Director of Health Care Council. "This is the worst I have seen it as far as the need for healthcare. It is obvious to me we need to form an alliance once again."

The clear need for a community alliance around health advocacy was heart-felt among long-time community leaders on the panel, such as Paty Maduena, Chair of Orange County Congregation Community Organization, Dr. Thuy Nguyen of VNCOC Asian Health, Ellen Ahn, Executive Director of Korean Community Services and America Bracho, CEO of Latino Health Access.

"Our only choice is to work with one voice," said America Bracho. "With the leadership of the Coalition, we, together, need to define clear tasks in the next few weeks, and make our diverse voices come together as one. I was educated today of the critical need for all of us to support the 19 community clinics in our healthcare safety net."

As a result, the Coalition of Orange County Community Clinics will form a taskforce to tackle advocacy around access and affordability. A work plan for the task force is being developed by Coalition staff for use in 2009. The alliance is preliminarily being called Task Force for Access, Affordability and Advocacy.

Medical Provider Forum reviews potential projects

Eleven Coalition member clinics joined together at the most recent Medical Provider Forum. At that forum, a project manager for Kaiser Permanente spoke about the Proactive Office Encounter Program and its successes in providing better patient care, patient and provider satisfaction, and savings, both in time and money.

"Money might be made available to help train our community clinics on site that increases provider efficiency, while providing services that can be delivered by others on the health care team," said Ken Bell, MD, Chief Medical Officer for the Coalition.

UCI's Prime LC Program presented the Group Medical Visit (GMV) program – a way to cut costs, improve patient care, satisfaction and outcomes. With enough interest, UCI will hold a training in November with Ed Shahady, MD, an internationally-renowned leader in setting up group medical visits, that would be open to member providers.

Novellus Research Sites, Inc. presented their research protocols for FDA-approved non-placebo clinical studies that could provide supplemental funding to clinics. They have programs in H1N1 anti-viral treatment, Diabetes, Asthma and others.

"This opportunity for study could add to the partnership that we are building with the super region on clinical and operational measures for the AQCC program," said Jose Perez, MD, Medical Director at Central City CHC. Dr. Perez also added how this could also enhance grant-writing opportunities.

"Ongoing Coalition efforts to formalize and strengthen 'super region' collaboration with the Los Angeles and San Diego clinic consortia, are focused not only on improving diabetes programs, but also clinical and operational measures for 'meaningful use,'" said Cathy Sakansky, Director of Quality Management at the Coalition.

Members vote to coordinate local push for medical home concept

On August 27, clinic members voted to collaborate in promoting the local implementation of the patient-centered medical home (PCMH) model.

Dr. Tom Bent, COO & Medical Director at Laguna Beach Community Clinic commented on the fact that the PCMH model is fading a resurgence in more and more clinic consortia across the nation, and that the California Legislature is seeking to define the term patient-centered medical home through Assembly Bill 1542 (Assembly Health Committee).

With the PCMH model, members can transform themselves into "health centers of the future" – a strategic goal targeted by Coalition's "Safety Net of the Future" Initiative.

Coalition works with 89.3 FM to tell the OC story

The Coalition is helping the newsroom at KPCC 89.3 FM reach out to the community for examples of how cuts in the state budget are or will be affecting Orange County residents. All responses are confidential, and nothing you share is aired or published without your permission. A reporter or producer might call for further information. In responding, you become part of the Insight Network, a group of people in Southern California who act as news sources for the KPCC newsroom by sharing their experiences.

To share your insights on how the state budget will affect you and those around you, follow this link: <http://www.sqpr.org/in/questions/fufufough/>

And to add your experiences using or lacking health care insurance, use this link: <http://www.sqpr.org/in/questions/healthcare/>