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Philippine Center Clinic, a Lifeline for the Disadvantaged

Health care providers donate time to care for city's working poor

By FELICIA THOMAS-LYNN

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Posted: Jan. 20, 2007 (reprinted with permission)



Dr. Violeta A. Singson checks the heartbeat of patient Wilfredo Larrondo. Photo/Rick Wood

Soon after Wilfredo Larrondo landed a new job building wooden pallets, he learned he no longer qualified for Milwaukee County's health care coverage for the indigent and working poor.

Larrondo, whose company didn't offer medical insurance, earned \$10 more in each

Philippine Center Free Medical Clinic Mission: To serve the uninsured and the under-insured, regardless of race, gender, age, religion, employment or immigration status.

*Clinic is open on
2nd and 4th Saturday
mornings of the month*

Address: 535 N. 27th Street

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paycheck - an amount that pushed him over the income guidelines to remain in the General Assistance Medical Program.

But for the 56-year-old, who suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and high cholesterol, having medical insurance, particularly to cover his medications, was critical.

"I take four pills daily. If I don't have my medicine, I get very sick. My blood pressure goes crazy," he said. . . . *Cont'd on pg 7*

Walk for Cancer by Patrick Moloney



Earlier this month, Doug Pasniak and I attended the *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer*, kickoff breakfast at the Italian Community Center. To highlight the extent to which this disease has touched the entire community the emcee called on all those who had survived breast cancer to stand up. She then called on those who have had a mother or sister suffer from this disease, followed by anyone who directly knew someone who had had breast cancer, and finally, those who indirectly knew of someone, were also asked to stand. Not a single individual in the room was left sitting!

Despite its pervasive reach, strides are being made against this disease and fund raisers such as this, fuel further important life-saving research.

I invite all our members to join Annalie and I for the walk on May 5th. An event registration and sponsorship form is included as a flyer with this newsletter. FAAWIS will host a breakfast picnic for our own walkers and a very brief service *Cont'd on pg 14*

Making Strides Against Breast Cancer

Saturday May 5th

O'Donnell Park 10:00a.m.

910 E. Michigan St.

Opposite Milw Art Museum

FAAWIS Breakfast: 9:15a.m.

**UPCOMING
FAAWIS
EVENTS**

SPRING DANCE
April 21, 2007
(see flyer)

WALK FOR CANCER
May 5, 2007
(see above)

PICNIC
July 22, 2007

Free Medical Clinic *cont'd from page 1*

"My medication is very expensive. I can't afford it."

So once a month, he turns up at the Philippine Center Free Medical Clinic, 535 N. 27th St., which operates on second and fourth Saturdays and offers exams, health screenings, immunizations and other basic medical treatment and dental referrals for the uninsured and underinsured.

On a recent Saturday, within an hour of the clinic's 9 a.m. opening, the waiting room was filled to capacity.

"It's always this busy," said Charita Bates, supervisor of the clinic, as she zoomed between patients waiting in line for an empty exam room.

The clinic is run by Filipino doctors and other health care professionals, with assistance from area medical students, who all donate their time to serve the poor.

"The clinic is in keeping with the aspiration of the Filipino-Americans in Milwaukee to give something back to the community," said Violeta Singson, a Milwaukee pediatrician and medical director for the clinic, which was initiated using a \$3,000 grant from the Philippine Medical Association of Wisconsin.



<< Nikangelea Chavis (left) fills out a medical history with help from her grandmother Charlotte Brown as her daughter, Cheryl Foster, 17 months, rests against her at the free medical clinic operated by the Philippine Center.

Singson said that, "while practicing medicine at their respective doctors' offices, many association members witnessed abject poverty in the midst of plenty. Touched by the suffering of many of those in the city, the desire grew to eventually serve the disadvantaged and the underprivileged citizens of our community."

Since opening the clinic six years ago, the patient load has skyrocketed, climbing from 107 patients during its first full year to 1,097. The clinic relies heavily on donor support, from hospitals that offer to do X-rays at a reduced rate to donations from private individuals.

At least 35% of the patients are infants through 18 years old; 56% are 19 to 65 and; 9% are older than 65.

"My biggest challenge now, in addition to funding, is having two adult physicians every clinic day," said Singson, adding that the clinic usually has only one doctor who serves adults. "My comfort level is limited to children and simple adult problems."

Though the Saturday free clinic is scheduled to close at noon, it continues to see patients several hours after.

"We haven't turned people away, but they have to wait a lot longer," she said. "We get out of there after 3 p.m., and I sometimes bring my charts home."

But for patients like Larrondo, who left the clinic with one month's supply for each of his various medications, their efforts are vital and potentially life-saving.

"Without this place," Larrondo said, "I don't know where I would be."

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