

HEALTHCARE ALTERNATIVES IN NEVADA COUNTY
League of Women Voters of Western Nevada County - January 9, 2010

January's meeting was an extraordinary event in all respects, as representatives of six local healthcare providers came together to discuss the services they provide to our community. More than 50 members and guests listened and asked questions of the panel members as each addressed the services offered.

Panelists included Pam Padilla, Administration Services Director for **Chapa-De Indian Health Program**; Vanessa Bengston, Executive Director of **Hospice of the Foothills**; Carolyn Seyler, Quality Assurance Nurse Manager for **Miners Family Center**; Wendy Barnhart, Operations Director for **Sierra Family Medical Services**; Annalise O'Connor, Vice President of Human Resources of **Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital**; and Linda Rachmel, RN & Practice Manager of **Yuba Docs**.

Chapa-De Indian Health Program, a private, non-profit organization, has been serving the Native American population for 30 years. While the majority of their patients are non-Native, they also service the general population. Ms. Padilla said Chapa-De means "*where the valley meets the foothills*". She described their new Grass Valley facility as serene, suggesting that patients begin the healing process as they enter the door. Funding sources included the Federal government with a large portion derived from Medicare and MediCal. In addition to accepting private insurance, Chapa-De also provides sliding scale fees for the uninsured. Services include family care, women's health care and dental services. Current staff includes a primary care physician, a nurse practitioner, and two gynecologists. Hiring continues in order to maximize their medical services.

Vanessa Bengston, Executive Director of **Hospice of the Foothills**, gave an in-depth narration of the end-of-life services available in our community. The philosophy of Hospice is to provide care not only to the patients but also to their families. Started in the 70's, Hospice of the Foothills became Medicare and MediCal-certified 15 years ago, and since its inception has never turned anyone away. Their inter-disciplinary team, which includes the Medical Director, RNs, Home Health Aids, Physical Therapists and Spiritual Care Counselors, is available 24-hours a day, bringing skilled care to terminal patients. Nurses who visit patients in their homes are specialized in pain management. Spiritual Care Coordinators help families connect to faith providers in the community. In 2009 Hospice serviced 440 patients in their homes, taking care of about 70 a day. A new 12-patient residential facility is almost fully licensed and will house patients who cannot be cared for in their homes.

Miners Family Center is a non-profit, licensed rural health center. Health services are available to everyone including the under- and uninsured. Carolyn Seyler's, Quality Assurance Nurse Manager, position is funded by the Federal government to work with rural clinics to expand and enhance their health programs. Besides Federal Funding and health insurance resources, Miners Family Center receives grants from private foundations and offers sliding fees for those without health insurance. Full Services range from pediatric care, teen clinics, family planning, women's health, preventive care, lab services, geriatrics and dental care. Currently they have about 45,000 patients visits a year. The teen clinic is covered under a state-mandated program called Family Pack that offers teens specific services and treatments.

Wendy Barnhart, Operations Director for North San Juan Ridge's **Sierra Family Clinic**, reported that it is a Federally qualified healthcare center authorized to provide medical, dental and behavioral services to anyone who asks. Though they do not refuse service to anyone, they are mandated to collect as much as possible from patients before asking for Federal funding.

Sierra Family Medical Clinic is a safety net providing for the uninsured; they just have to call and ask for help. Because of the difficulty in recruiting medical providers, incentives are offered. Funding resources include Federal and private grants, Medicare, MediCal plus a sliding scale for the uninsured. First Five funds the dentistry program. They have 16,000 - 20,000 patient visits per year. Open Monday to Saturday, they take walk-ins. They offer tele-medicine so patients are able to speak directly with doctors or specialists from other facilities such as UC Davis Medical Center. Services also include pain management, weight loss, substance abuse, reproductive services, plus the government-based teen Family Pack program.

Annalise O'Connor, Vice President of Human Resources, described **Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital's** services. The hospital recently celebrated its 50th anniversary in Grass Valley having served the community since 1958. It has unique relationship with Catholic HealthCare West (CHW), affiliated but not owned by them. This means all money coming to SNMH stays in Nevada County. Fast facts: 104 licensed beds, more out-patient care than in-patient, ER had 31,000 visit last year, 55% of the volume are Medicare related, and over 900 employees. They must treat anyone who requests services. Unpaid services come to about \$12,000,000 each year. MediCal pays them \$0.22 on the dollar. They offer cardiac, wellness, women, pediatrics, orthopedic and home care facilities and programs, plus ambulatory treatment, breast imaging and cancer centers. Ms. O'Connor emphasized the need for everyone to an "Advanced Health Care Directive"* on file which outlines the wishes of the patient.

Linda Rachmel, RN and Practice Manager at **Yuba Docs**, told members that her urgent care facility (not critical care), has been part of the community for 10 years. Open 7 days a week, closed nights and three holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas & New Years), they will take patients whose doctors may be unavailable. Walk-in patients are assured same-day service since they take few appointments. Appointments are usually for follow-up care of a patient they have treated. Doctors handle minor emergencies including lacerations and acute illnesses. They cover women's health care, pediatrics, workers' compensation, occupational medicine and employment physicals. More severe emergencies are referred to other facilities or the hospital ER, calling an ambulance, if necessary. **Yuba Docs** receives \$22 from Medicare patients. They offer a 20% discount to patients who pay at time of service.

The health care panelists impressed everyone with their compassion and dedication to finding the best treatment for every patient, whether at their own facility or another. Members and guests came away with greater knowledge of our community health care facilities and services. So did the panelists.

Dottie Schmidt

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