

Community Health Center Looks Toward a Clean Bill of Health

By Alexis Wayne
Contributing Writer

A year ago, Community Health Centers of Southern Nevada was on the brink of insolvency. Today, it held an open house as a way of celebrating its resurgence.

The center, located at 916 W. Owens, provides medical services to low- and moderate-income residents. On Tuesday, center officials opened its doors to businesspersons, community representatives, and bankers in order to display its financial condition and market its long-term business plan.

Bank West of Nevada underwrote the open house.

Larry Woodrum, Bank West's president, says it offers an excellent opportunity for the bank to support the community.

"We've found that a small bank like us can sponsor things like this to get people involved," Woodrum says.

Health care demands also sparked the bank's interest, Woodrum says. "Health care is very important. A high percentage of people in this neighborhood don't have proper health care."

Edward Martinez, the center's director, gave a presentation with bar graphs and pie charts. Martinez wanted to display the current and projected

demands upon the center, which now serves more than 3,000 clients a month.

The center's patients include African-Americans, Hispanics and Caucasians, even though it is located in Nucleus Plaza.

Martinez directed some of his attention toward local Community Reinvestment Act bank representatives who attended the event.

CRA representatives hold the purse-strings to millions of dollars in federal funds designed to reinvigorate persons and areas in need, which normally face difficulty obtaining financing.

When Martinez took over the center nearly a year ago, it owed



Edward Martinez (left), the Community Health Center director, discusses the future of the facility with Larry Gramel (center) and Wayne Wedlow (right).
Photo by Victor Ingram

HEALTH BRIEFS

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Dr. Alan L. Buchman, a gastroenterologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, is studying the impact a choline shortage has on TPN patients and the benefit of adding it to their diets.

Choline is a component of cell membranes and is essential for nerve cells to communicate.

"The body usually makes its own choline and also absorbs it from soy products, organ meats, eggs and other foods," Buchman said.

"People on TPN cannot absorb choline from their diet, and their bodies cannot manufacture it. This deficiency often results in a fatty liver, which can progress to cirrhosis and liver failure."

With a \$221,000 grant from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Buchman is evaluating whether adding choline to TPN solutions improves liver function.

NEW DRUG MAY HELP WITH AIDS BLINDNESS

A new drug, MSL-109, is being tested to see if it can increase the amount of time between occurrences of cytomegalovirus retinitis, a major cause of blindness among people with AIDS.

The drug uses a human CMV-specific monoclonal antibody to target an outside receptor on the virus, making it more difficult for the virus to attach itself to cells. Once attached, the virus is nourished, allowing it to reproduce.

"We hope this window of time between CMV recurrence can be increased," said Dr. Richard A. Lewis, an ophthalmologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

In earlier studies, the drug demonstrated virtually no side effects among several hundred patients, Lewis said.

MSL-109 is produced by Protein Design Laboratories and is under evaluation in a multi-

center program sponsored by the Studies of the Ocular Complications of AIDS Research Group.

FREE BROCHURE ON HEALTHY MARRIAGES

Partners in a marriage may never see eye to eye on certain things, but there are proven ways to work through difficult spots.

Tips on keeping a relationship healthy are included in "Marital Communication: The Key to a Healthy Partnership," published by Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

A free copy is available to any U.S. resident who sends a stamped, self-addressed, business size (#10) envelope to: "Marital Communication," Office of Public Affairs, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas 77030, USA.

GOT A COLD?

WASH YOUR HANDS

If you catch a cold, remember to wash your hands a lot.

Many colds result from rubbing the nose or eyes with fingers that picked up a virus from hand-to-hand contact, said Dr. Christine Matson of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

When people with colds

cough and sneeze into their hands and then touch objects at home, work or school or touch each other, they leave cold-causing viruses behind. Frequent hand washing can lessen this transmission.

Tissues and handkerchiefs can also be helpful because they catch the germs expelled through coughing and sneezing.

IS IT STUTTERING?

Certain early speech patterns of youngsters can be mistaken for stuttering, but sharp listening skills can help parents know if there is reason for concern.

Dr. David B. Rosenfield, a neurologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, lists five hallmarks of stuttering:

*Stumbling on a sound more than five times: b-b-b-b-b-b-ball.

*Adding a sound that does not belong or a sound other than the intended vowel: ba ba ba book.

*Getting out the beginning of a word, but pausing before completing it.

*Struggling at getting words started.

*Revising or switching words in mid-sentence: I want a gl-cup of water.

more than \$1 million to its vendors and other businesses.

"There were times when payroll checks were bouncing," Martinez recalls.

The center devised a debt renegotiation plan to keep it afloat. As a result, it was able to gain write-offs from large creditors — \$160,000 from Eastman Kodak and \$120,000 from University Medical Center of Southern Nevada.

In spite of the renegotiation, the health center still faced an uphill battle in meeting its payment schedule, says Burt Rosenberg, the center's comptroller.

Rosenberg and other members of the executive staff say the center has broken even the last two months.

The center is still not completely in the black. But it is looking to obtain a new building and provide additional services to its clientele such as dental and mental health care, says George Cantu, chairman of its board.

Cantu says his memory of prior financial troubles remains fresh. He recalls a recovery committee which was formed to

salvage the center had to travel to Washington to appeal to the Public Health Service in an effort to keep the doors open.

The focus has now shifted to networking and marketing the concept of maintaining quality public health care.

There are four full-time physicians at the center. Its offerings include family practice, prenatal care, obstetrics and gynecology and pediatrics.

Executive staffers pointed out the center's services to the Nevada Congressional

delegation, as well as city and county elected officials in an effort to secure support.

This support may become critical as Congress considers placing welfare and public health in the hands of the states to distribute via block grants, a concept which concerns Martinez.

Martinez says if Congress approves the block grant program, the center could lose up to 40% of its income as Medicaid cuts would be forthcoming.

SENIORS UPDATE DRIVING SKILLS

Pre-registration is required for people 55 and older to attend "55 Alive" AARP's two-day refresher driving course at the Las Vegas Senior Citizens Center, 450 E. Bonanza Rd.

The course is offered twice monthly. Daytime sessions and evening sessions available, call for dates and times.

The course is designed for drivers who experience age-related physical changes, such as declining perceptual skills. Highlights include "rules of the road" review, local driving hazards, and accident-prevention measures.

All automobile insurance companies in Nevada provide premium reductions to graduates of "55 Alive."

Payment will not be accepted at the door. The cost is \$8 and pre-registration must be made by calling 792-4091. Classes are limited to 30 people.

For registration information, call 792-4091.



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