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## Work continues toward bringing health care clinic to Oakley

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For the Contra Costa Times

Posted: 09/22/2010 02:29:16 PM PDT

Updated: 09/22/2010 02:29:16 PM PDT

OAKLEY -- For 25 years, Maria Juanita Fernandez has lived with diabetes, which she said requires significant care that is difficult to afford without insurance.

"Diabetes is like cancer. It starts damaging parts of your body a little bit at a time," Fernandez told a standing-room-only audience Sept. 15 to discuss plans to bring a health care clinic to the city.

Three years ago, Fernandez said she had a wound on her foot because of complications from diabetes. Because she could not afford the treatment, she didn't immediately seek medical attention for the injury, and had to have her toe amputated.

With no insurance, Fernandez was given a \$34,000 bill for her treatment. She was able to pay \$6,000 before she had to stop working because of health reasons.

Only six months later, she had another lesion on her toe that would not heal. This time, she went to Mexico and was charged \$100 for treatment. Three months ago, she had another toe amputated.

"We need a clinic here in Oakley," she said through a translator. "Many of the people my age can't drive and can't get to other clinics out of town. We deserve to have preventive care in this situation."

Stories like Fernandez's inspired a group at St. Anthony Church to look into why the city, home to more than 36,000 residents, does not have a doctor's office, much less a clinic to help the uninsured.

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Organization (CCISCO) has worked with city leaders and several local legislators to open a clinic in Oakley with the help of an Oakland-based organization, La Clinica. La Clinica is preparing to sign a lease on a space in Cypress Square Plaza off Main Street by Big Break Road.

At last week's forum, CCISCO representatives honored several contributors and volunteers for their effort to bring the clinic to Oakley. They also said they are \$163,562 from reaching their fundraising goal.

"We have received many generous donations," CCISCO co-chairwoman Iris Gomez said.

So far, the group has racked up \$915,000 through several large contributors, including John Muir Health Foundations (\$450,000), Sutter Delta Medical Center (\$200,000) and Kaiser Permanente (\$40,000).

Gomez said the group is waiting for Kaiser's national board of directors to sign off on an additional \$500,000 grant that will not only help the clinic open its doors but also provide the needed funds to sustain the operation for the next three years.

"Kaiser is the key," Oakley City Manager Bryan Montgomery said.

He said that if the grant comes through, the clinic could open its doors early next year.

Additional funding would be necessary for the clinic to stay open. One option for funding could be the federal health care bill signed into law in March.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act allows for money to support clinics in communities throughout the nation. Supporters of the Oakley clinic hope that their community will be one of them. The federal grants will not be decided until next summer.

Help from local leaders would be needed to obtain the funding, Montgomery said. Gomez encouraged residents to continue writing letters to let legislators know of the need for a clinic in Oakley.

The clinic will offer an array of medical services, including prenatal care and referrals to specialists. Most important to organizers here, La Clinica will make special efforts to accommodate low-income residents. The clinic will help

new patients access state and federal health care funds, and offer services on a sliding-fee scale.

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