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To: Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners

Through: Hector Flores, Assistant to the County Administrator

From: Suzanne Roberts, M.ED Chief Executive Officer

Date: November 3, 2015

Subject: FQHC New Access Point for Charlotte County, FL

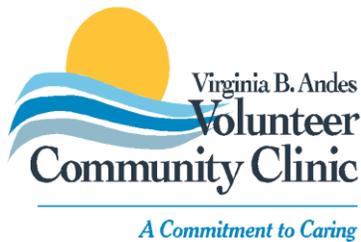
Background

The Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Community Clinic established an FQHC Steering Committee in July of 2013, for purpose of creating an FQHC New Access Point for Charlotte County, FL.

The new FQHC Access Point will help to provide primary healthcare and mental health services for residents living in Charlotte County Florida, especially those in the medically underserved areas of Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda and Englewood. The proposed service area will include Zip Codes 33954, 33948, 33952, 33980, 33981 and 34224. The target populations are individuals in these geographic areas with incomes at or less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Approximately 30.2% of the residents in the proposed service area meet this criteria. VBA has developed a successful, long term community partnership with Charlotte Behavioral Health Care (CBHC) which has provided both VBA and CBHC patients with essential access to their healthcare needs.

Current Healthcare Challenge

The Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County stopped providing primary health care in 2013. This has resulted in the County's uninsured and underinsured unable to obtain affordable healthcare. At the time the Charlotte County Health Department announced its intent to cease primary care, the closest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) to the south assured the Health Department Administrator that it would help fill the void. However uninsured individuals have reported that it is difficult to schedule an appointment. The nearest FQHC accepting appointments borders the Charlotte/Sarasota County line and is absorbing some patients. However, this site is already functioning near capacity and, for many individuals, driving there can take 30 minutes or more. There is limited public transportation in Charlotte County and even less between the two counties.



The above circumstances have placed enormous burden on the Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Community Clinic (VBA), a no-cost clinic and pharmacy that provides services free of charge to eligible low-income individuals, Monday through Friday 9am-9pm.

VBA has experienced an explosion of uninsured patients who have no alternative source of care. The surge of patients has created a financial burden on the free clinic, which is not equipped to provide full preventive primary care services but due to the ever growing need, currently has taken on partial primary care responsibility, as the health care safety net for the uninsured in Charlotte County. VBA currently serves over 6,000 clinic and pharmacy patients annually. In 2014, its free pharmacy distributed roughly 10,000 prescriptions. In addition, the free clinic assists patients in enrolling in Compassionate Care programs offered by most major pharmaceutical companies. In 2014, the PAP program distributed a value of \$3.5 million in medications. All of the providers providing care do so under sovereign immunity and receive not compensation.

In addition, the VBA clinic receives in-kind services from over 68 medical specialties, as radiological services for diagnostics, orthopedics, oncology care, general surgery, anesthesiology, dermatology, dental and others. Because the need for specialty care is so high, the three area hospitals each donate financially and provide their surgical facilities for two procedures a month to attend to serious or life-threatening conditions. In 2014, over 30 in-kind surgical procedures were performed. The experience of the VBA and area hospitals' uncompensated care demonstrate the need for additional access to nearby sliding scale.

VBA is staffed by a corps of 220 committed medical and non-medical volunteers who believe that healthcare for the uninsured and under-insured is of prime importance and that their needs are vastly under-met. VBA's experience and feedback from its patients regarding the difficulty in accessing healthcare led it to assemble a diverse group of medical providers, volunteers, County government and human services professionals, business people and other concerned county organizations and individuals. Their intent was to prepare this application for a New Access Point FQHC within the borders of Charlotte County. The site has been tentatively secured for the existing building space, located at 1100 Loveland Port Charlotte, FL.

Next Steps

1. Completion of the Business Plan
2. Secure Seed Funding for Start up
3. Secure Community Partnerships
4. Completion of Application to be submitted in Spring 2016

The goal is to provide quality, integrated primary care and behavioral health services, under the umbrella of VBA that can be easily accessed to Charlotte County low income residents, utilizing existing infrastructure from established community partner entities to minimize start-up costs.