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Five Years and Counting

Mary B. O'Donnell
New York Medical College

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Five Years and Counting

Mary Breige O'Donnell

La Casita de la Salud, “the little house of health,” was no little idea. New York Medical College’s student-run health clinic was proposed in 2003 by three medical students and came to fruition with the opening of its doors on September 24, 2005. Located in East Harlem, in affiliation with Metropolitan Hospital, the clinic began by hosting three clinic days dates in its inaugural year. La Casita de la Salud celebrated its fifth anniversary in September during a very successful 2010-2011 year. Here is a look back at what that idea has grown into over five short years and a look forward at what the future holds.

Today, we strive to keep the clinic open every weekend and have nearly one hundred medical student volunteers. We began the 2010-2011 academic year with only two physician preceptors, but were able to recruit four additional volunteer preceptors. We also expanded our team by adding two paid preceptors, who work at the clinic twice a month. With a total of six volunteer and two paid preceptors to treat patients and mentor student volunteers, we have been able to hold clinic nearly every Saturday.

In addition to needing a sufficient number of preceptors to oversee clinic operations, La Casita relies heavily on fundraising. This has always been of significant importance but became a primary goal for the 2010-2011 executive board. From 2007 to 2009, the clinic raised approximately \$9,165. The current fundraising committee and executive board, with the help of family, friends, colleagues, faculty and alumni, have successfully raised over \$9,700 during the 2010-2011 year alone. This will certainly contribute to maintaining clinic operations regularly over the next academic year.

La Casita de la Salud is an integral part of the East Harlem community. The patient population of the clinic reports a mean household annual income of \$17,701. Because the majority is Spanish speaking, an interpreter is present on all clinic days. In an effort to continue to meet the needs of the community, expanding clinic services is always at the forefront of clinic operations. The 2010-2011 year saw the implementation of a mental health screening and expansion of patient education and community resources available at La Casita. In addition to adding these resources, La Casita de la Salud’s Women’s Health Clinic opened this past November. This clinic provides well-woman exams and routine gynecological care for women in the community and held its fifth clinic date on March 26th.

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...[La Casita de la Salud] serves a vital role in the community of East Harlem [and] serves as an amazing educational opportunity for all medical students at NYMC. ”

While the clinic serves a vital role in the community of East Harlem, it also serves as an amazing educational opportunity for all medical students at NYMC’s. Having the ability to participate in the student-run clinic as a preclinical medical student offers early exposure not only to the clinical environment, but also to the field of primary care. This opportunity has been shown to be an important consideration for prospective medical students. The 2010 NYMC Interviewee Survey of MD applicants (c/o 2014) showed that 90% stated that having a clinic is “very important” in their choice of a medical school. Also, among those interviewees, 98% stated they would want to participate in La Casita, if accepted to NYMC.

Third and fourth year medical students continue to actively participate in La Casita by volunteering and remaining as senior executive board members. By continuing to volunteer with the clinic, these students are afforded the opportunity to foster a positive learning experience for their peers through teaching and leading by example, all while treating patients.

A great deal has been accomplished over the past five years and La Casita de la Salud has become a successful installation in the community of East Harlem. However, challenges continue to arise and must be overcome to continue to provide services that meet the needs of not only the local community, but also the New York City community at large. The 2011-2012 executive board strives to expand community resources available to the patient population, as well as to continue reaching out to organizations in the community that will benefit from La Casita. We believe it is essential for those serving the community in other capacities to know what we provide so that we can work together and reach out to those in need. We plan to continue the successful fundraising efforts of our predecessors and to add to the growing fund of resources that will aid in expanding the clinic and enhancing services. We are very proud of the five years of amazing work that has been accomplished. We can only hope that we will add to the success of those who have paved the way for us by continuing to provide quality and culturally competent care to the people of East Harlem and surrounding communities.

For more information about La Casita de la Salud, please visit us on the web at: www.nymc.edu/student_clinic/



Paul Janoian
Tappan Zee Bridge