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# Clinica Comunitaria Familiar in El Centenario



By Carla Wilson

On a gorgeous and cool Saturday morning, I headed for El Centenario to visit the newly-opened Clinica Comunitaria Familiar. The clinic is a project of the non-profit Fundación Astra, whose mission is to provide health care, free of charge, to the community in and around El Centenario.

The clinic is off Calle Seis in a traditional family-style casa. The yard is a large garden with colorful blossoms and fragrant flowering trees. A freshly-painted sign on the front of the clinic features the foundation's logo.

We were greeted by Dr. Nancy Harris, M.D., President and Founder of Fundación Astra. She introduced us to her team of medical providers, administrative staff, and community volunteers. The team was open-hearted and eager to talk about their roles and the focus of the clinic. It was mid-morning and they were busy registering patients, doing medical intakes, and attending to children brought along by family members.

The clinic is open every Saturday from 9 to 5. The focus is on family medicine, nutrition, and psychology services, with special emphasis on integrated healthcare of the whole individual, including mental wellness. The team is prepared to address a wide variety of health care needs, to provide primary care and to refer patients for diagnostics and specialty care when needed.

Prevention and education are key goals of the clinic. Treatment for conditions like diabetes, respiratory conditions, and chronic pain will include education and instruction on nutrition and prevention. Nutritional programs and health education are available to all age groups, with special focus on at-risk youth.

The team includes a medical director, a psychologist, registered nurses, a nutritionist, a coordinator, a manager, an educa-

tion coordinator, and volunteer administrative support.

Dr. Harris provides the leadership and direction of the clinic. After practicing medicine since 1986, she now spends much of her time in BCS. Her international experience includes 17 years in Tibet, serving people who had very little access to healthcare. She is committed to providing diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and health education to the people of El Centenario, in partnership with national and local authorities, healthcare professionals, and community members. She has assembled a team of local and international professionals, supported by local community members.

Francoise Begaux, MSF, serves as Program Manager. She brings twenty years of experience running programs in Tibet, Brazil, Burma, and now Mexico. She is trained as a physical therapist, and develops all the culturally-adapted health education materials. She is the logistician for the program.

Adriana Riedel is the Clinic Administration Coordinator. She lives in El Centenario and brings her love of community and family to the clinic.

Dr. Guadalupe Martinez, psychologist, sees patients each Saturday. She helps people deal with mental health needs and emotional health issues. She brings multiple modalities



Francoise Begaux, Program Manager



*Ute Kretschmer, Alejandro Pulido and Deborah MacDonald*

to her sessions and will conduct workshops for at-risk youths and their families.

Dr. Dennis Alvarez, M.D., is the clinic's medical director. During the week, she is the physician at the phosphate mine in San Juan de la Costa. To make time each Saturday for the clinic, she brings her beautiful toddler, Valentina. Her example sets the tone of the clinic, ensuring that it is a family-focused, warm, friendly, and safe place for families to come for treatment.

We met Yahn Vazquez, the registered nutritionist. Yahn serves as nutritional counselor and talked with us about the need to help patients make decisions on food choices. "We can help many people to have better quality of life by changing their diet," he said, "but we want to empower people to make dietary decisions that will help their whole family." Yahn uses games and other visual tools to help people understand the amounts of sugar in processed drinks.

Dr. Deborah MacDonald, Assistant Professor, Clinical Cancer Genetics, was a nurse researcher and consultant in hereditary cancer risk and risk reduction at the City of Hope (COH) Comprehensive Cancer Center and Beckman Research Institute in Southern California. While reviewing medical histories and obtaining current health information including vital signs and blood glucose level, she establishes rapport with the patient and helps them feel more comfortable.

Ute Kretschmer is a Registered Nurse with many years of intensive care experience in Switzerland. She is an avid cyclist — she has ridden the Baja peninsula 3 times!

We had the pleasure of meeting Alejandro Pulido, a long-time member of the El Centenario community. Alex wants to help the clinic meet the health needs of his community. He spoke about the need to help people return to traditional foods and ways of eating that support health and help people with diabetes to manage their diet and that of their family. "Kids," he said, "need a place to learn about good food and nutrition to break the cycle of diabetes."

Dr. Harris told us that roughly half the patients are coming for complications with diabetes. "Diabetics don't just come in with high blood sugar," Harris says, "It's about controlling multiple health problems at once." Type 2 diabetes has become the second leading cause of death in the state, surpassed only by heart disease. This is a lifestyle disease, more likely to develop in people who are overweight. Mexi-

co has seen a rapid increase in obesity, with the number of people categorized as overweight and obese tripling over the last four decades. The obesity problem is a side effect of Mexico's economic progress. Type 2 diabetes has skyrocketed as soda consumption has risen. In 2012, Mexico was the world's top per capita consumer of soda, guzzling 176 liters — about 500 cans! — for every man, woman and child per year. The Mexican people can now afford — at roughly two dollars a day — a diet heavy in carbohydrates, sugar, and fat that delivers way more calories than the WHO's recommended daily intake of two thousand calories. A 2015 study found Mexico to be the leading consumer of junk food in Latin America, consuming 450 pounds of ultra processed foods and sugary beverages per person each year.

Clinica Comunitaria Familiar will address these needs head-on. The clinic's health education programs and dietary assistance are anchored in the philosophy of preparing and enjoying food that is grown locally.

If you find yourself in El Centenario on a Saturday, stop by for a visit. You will be welcomed by professional and friendly folks who are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of our community members.

*Gracias Dr. Harris y su hermoso equipo. ¡Mucha suerte mientras trabajas por la salud de la gente de El Centenario!*

*Carla Wilson lives in La Paz and San Francisco, CA. Her background includes doctoral degrees in acupuncture, Chinese medicine and research with 30 years in non-profit medical care. She is a professor at California Institute for Integral Studies.*



*Dr. Dennis Alvarez, Medical Director*



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