

Thousands attend free health clinic in Los Angeles

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A clinic offering free medical services for the uninsured and underinsured is currently being held in the Los Angeles suburb of Inglewood, California.

The clinic began on August 11 and lasts through August 18. During its first four days of operation in the city, the non-profit Remote Area Medical (RAM) provided care to 3,010 attendees, at an estimated cost of about \$500,000 a day.

According to RAM, the services it provided during the first four days of operation included 1,033 tooth extractions, 2,054 fillings, 236 mammograms, and 739 new pairs of eye glasses. Additionally other organizations not directly affiliated with RAM were also present to provide free HIV tests and other medical services and screenings.

The RAM organization, founded by former *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* host Stan Brock, was originally intended to bring free medical care to remote areas of South America. The organization has since expanded its operations to the United States, where for 47 million men, women and children, medical care is effectively as unavailable as it is to a villager in the farthest reaches of the Amazon.

The organization most notably provided services in New Orleans during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Its current intervention in Los Angeles is its largest yet. In spite of these massive undertakings, both in the US and abroad, it is only able to provide medical treatment to a fraction of those in need.

World Socialist Web Site reporters visited the Los Angeles event on Saturday and spoke with both volunteers and patients.

Craig Baines attended with his daughter Tyler, a chemistry major at California State University Stanislaus. Craig spoke about his experience at the

clinic and his reasons for attending.

"I worked at the same architectural firm for 27 years before being let go earlier this year. A number of younger employees were then brought in at lower salaries. I'm currently on unemployment now and am looking for work. But regardless, my responsibility is to make sure that my daughter has the medical care she needs."

Asked about his experience obtaining a ticket for the event, Baines said that he had arrived at two in the morning on Thursday and waited until 10 am before he received one.

"I'm very happy with the work they did on me here. Everyone was very courteous and professional. Unfortunately, those who didn't get in line quite as early as I did had to be turned away, which was sad. I think this event was beautiful but it shouldn't be something that we have to wait five to ten years to receive. Free health care like this should be an established practice in our society."

Viridiana Herera works at a local McDonald's restaurant that doesn't provide her with any health benefits. She attended the clinic with her mother and son.

"Right now my son is receiving dental care through Medi-Cal; however, he is only allowed to receive treatments twice a year. Right now he needs work done and I took advantage of the opportunity. Also, I have to receive treatment here because Medi-Cal only covers him and not me."

When asked what she would do when faced with a serious medical condition as a member of the uninsured, Viridiana replied that she currently receives insurance through the ORSA program, which is a type of insurance provided by the county of Los Angeles to a small sector of low income workers to cover

outpatient care.

“I actually got hit by a car a number of months ago and fortunately the driver’s insurance was able to pay for my medical costs. I don’t want to think where I’d be right now if it didn’t, and I don’t think ORSA would have been able to cover the treatments I received.”

WSWS reporters also spoke with Arnold Duale who was released from prison in October 2008 and is currently looking for work.

“I’m a truck driver but am currently unemployed. I was receiving unemployment benefits until last week when they stopped sending me checks, and they still haven’t given me any explanation as to why the checks stopped. I only received the checks for five months. I applied for an extension and the request wasn’t granted as far as I know.”

When asked what brought him to the clinic, Arnold said that he had severe dental problems along with a hernia, both of which the clinic providers weren’t able to treat.

“To make matters worse I got out of prison less than a year ago, and while I was there, they couldn’t operate on me. They would have had it become an absolute emergency, but since they didn’t think it was, all I got were pain killers. I’m going to try another place in West LA this coming Monday to see if they can help me, but I don’t exactly have my hopes up.

“The problem is that I have this condition and the best anyone can do for me is to give me pain killers and tell me not to lift anything heavy. Well, the line of work I’m in requires me to lift heavy things all the time. What am I supposed to do? My condition is so severe that I can’t even walk for very long without having to take a break. I just get so tired.

“I wish they could’ve done more to help me here but I’m grateful that they tried. Poor people should be able to get decent medical care just like everyone else. The funny thing is though, that poor people aren’t who you always expect them to be. I’ve seen a lot of people coming here to be treated driving some pretty nice cars. It’s a sign of the times I guess.”

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