



Yolo County's Salud Clinic Celebrates its 35th Year



By David Katz, MD

SALUD CLINIC, THE WEST SACRAMENTO branch of Communicare Health Centers, celebrated its 35th anniversary on Nov. 24, 2006. Approximately 100 individuals attended, including West Sacramento and Yolo County representatives, state legislators and officers of the Medical Society. It was a festive event hosted by

Communicare's Executive Director, Robin Affrime. After a moving presentation by founder Dr. John Loofbourow describing Salud's humble beginnings, numerous local elected officials took great pride in presenting plaques and declarations that will adorn the clinic's new walls. The clinic is now located in the Yolo County Offices on Triangle Court; a \$2 million dollar building campaign is under way to add nearly 10,000 square feet of new office space to serve the health care needs of the indigent. Please take time to read the following account of this remarkable clinic!

- Christian Serdahl, MD

The Beginning

Grass roots planning to establish Salud Clinic in East Yolo County began in 1970, through the efforts of John Siden, Paul Gutierrez, Jess Perez and Dr. John Loofbourow along with the thousands of East Yolo County residents who petitioned for its creation. In community meetings at Broderick Christian Center throughout the following year, the concept of founding a primary health care facility located in and serving the needs of the underserved East Yolo County communities was nurtured and grew.¹

Salud Clinic was needed, in the words of Dr. Loofbourow, because "illegal and substandard housing areas persisted with a high incidence of tuberculin reactors, drug users, alcoholics, and chronically ill adults; water was less than optimal. Care for local county indigents was available only in Woodland, and public transportation was scarce and expensive."²

The Salud East Yolo Medical Facility Board of Directors was established later in 1970 as a volunteer organization to oversee the construction of the Salud East Yolo Medical Facility (to be known as Salud Clinic) to serve the underserved East Yolo County communities. Funding for construction came from a multitude of small donations by members of the community and through the fundraising effort of the Salud Foundation. Dr. Loofbourow recalls that the Foundation was created to foster "user owned independent health facilities which operated in partnership with practicing physicians."²

Dr. Loofbourow purchased "an old ramshackle building at 530 C Street in Broderick"² to house the clinic. After renovation by many community and student volunteers, Salud Clinic opened on May 21, 1971, complete with laboratory and X-ray facilities. Pediatric, adult primary care and family planning services were provided. A school-based dental disease prevention program was also provided. As word of Salud Clinic services spread, more residents sought care, and by 1973 the staff was serving 50 patients a day.

Salud Clinic introduced the innovation of trained community health workers to Yolo County. They were drawn from the community and culture group to be served, had children of their own, and showed a willingness to pursue educational opportunities.

Funded by the American Cancer Society, a one-year training program was established using Salud facility for training and clinical opportunities. The program enrolled 12 students, and the clinic hired 10 of them half time. Dr. Loofbourow stated at the time, "The role of community health workers in communication with patients, health education and disease prevention is central to the development of a successful community clinic."¹ American Public Health Association stated that community health workers perform outreach services, patient tracking, home visiting, and are viewed as "an integral component of the health department's personal health care program."²

Becoming a Yolo County Health Department Clinic

From 1971 through 1973, Salud Clinic was mainly financed by donations, but, according to Dr. Loofbourow, it was chronically short of operating funds. "By early 1973 the Clinic was in financial jeopardy.... An ad hoc county committee was appointed to consider options regarding the future of the clinic. A Federal Revenue Sharing grant for \$200,000 was obtained with the provision that it be also approved by the Yolo County Board of Supervisors. Dr. Otis Cobb, the county health officer, urged that combining the medical functions of Salud with the preventive focus of the health department would result in a strong, integrated program."²

Ultimately, the clinic was placed under the management of the Yolo County Health Department. Later, the clinic moved into East Yolo County Health Department facilities down the street. As part of the County Health Department, Salud continued to provide primary care, prenatal, and dental services under the guidance of Dr. Otis Cobb and Dr. Bob Bates, for more than two decades. The Board of Directors of Salud Clinic became the Salud Advisory Board.

In 1994, with the closing of Yolo General Hospital and the formation of the Yolo Health Alliance, Salud Clinic became a community clinic once again, joining CommuniCare Health Centers. In 1995, Salud moved to its current location in the Yolo County offices on Triangle Court, at 500 B Jefferson Boulevard in West Sacramento. The clinic provided 22,000 patient visits in 2005 for primary health care, dental care, and perinatal services, and continues to expand to meet the health care needs of a growing community.

Memories of Salud Clinic

Memories of the first Salud Clinic in Broderick include those of Dr. Loofbourow, who remembers feeding lunches to all the early volunteer workers at the clinic, using food donated by local groceries and restaurants. Two current CommuniCare staff, Nidia Ochoa, PA-C, and Mariana McCamy, FNP, worked at Salud when it was part of the Yolo County Health Department. They recall Salud staff regularly lunching at Sal's Mexican Restaurant, which is still a West Sacramento fixture on Sacramento Avenue. Former Yolo County Health Officer Dr. Robert Bates recalls Dr. Cobb's vision of creating collaboration between the primary care, mental health, and public health services by housing them together in the remodeled high school facility. Dr. Karen Tait worked at Salud Clinic from 1987--1992 and recalls resuscitating a heroin overdose patient who was brought in from a pickup truck by his friends.

On November 14, 2006, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors celebrated the rich history and many contributions of Salud Clinic, its staff, and its many supporters over 35 years in a Proclamation marking the 35th Anniversary of Salud Clinic. The Supervisors saluted the Salud Clinic staff and supporters whose "passion and dedication to a healthy future for West Sacramento and the surrounding community has improved the lives of all who live here."³

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1. Interview with John Loofbourow, MD May 5, 2005
2. "Local Health Department Case Studies" American Public Health Association, Miller, C. 1981, pp. 480-496
3. Minutes of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors meeting, November 14, 2006

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