

GUEST COLUMN

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Media Contact:

Scott Packard, Public Information Officer
(409) 938-2211 (o) / (409) 392-0007 (c)
spackard@gchd.org



Time to Explore Future of Galveston Clinic

A Guest Column by GCHD Chief Executive Officer Dr. Mark Guidry

GALVESTON COUNTY, Texas – Coastal Health & Wellness (CHW), a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), is exploring a change in the way public health care is delivered on Galveston Island. I invite the community to join the conversation, but first, a bit of background.

In 1970, the clinics formerly know as 4C's were created with the award of a federal grant. Two clinics provide primary medical and dental care to indigent and uninsured, reducing the need for more costly specialty, hospital, and emergency care. Funded by the federal grant and county dollars, the clinics, while not free, do provide uninsured discounts based on financial screening. In 2014, the combined clinics provided health care services to 12,849 Galveston County residents with 39,683 total visits. The clinics' productivity and cost of care is better than state and federal averages.

In 2012, the Texas City site relocated into the new mid-county annex on Emmett Lowry Expressway, along with other public health services. Since the move, use of the modern and expanded location has grown to serving 70% of the total visits.

Conversely, visits to the Galveston clinic in the Island Community Center at 4700 Broadway, have decreased by half since 2010. Combinations of factors seem to account for this trend. After Hurricane Ike, many patients left the island and some relocated to the mainland. Some uninsured patients now have Obamacare insurance with new options on where they seek care. A mobile clinic now brings services to patients in remote areas who may have previously used the Galveston location. Finally, the current leased site is terribly outdated since opened in 1996 by the Sisters of Charity. As such, many patients prefer the newer Texas City location.

Although visits are down in Galveston, about 3,500 persons still accessed health care at the island location in 2014. The clinic reduces ER visits and provides follow-up care for uninsured persons discharged from the hospital or emergency room. In the recovery period of Ike, the clinic was among a rare few locations where residents and first responders could obtain primary care.

CHW has been monitoring the Galveston clinic for a few years, unsure how local, state, and federal policies might impact future healthcare needs. With the Galveston lease set to expire in July 2016, it's time to prepare for the future... Is a Galveston clinic needed anymore? Could Galveston patients seek care at the Texas City location? If a clinic presence is needed, what would it look like? Where located? How funded? Can CHW partner with other entities on the island to provide care in a different way? How would any change impact future funding?

Share your thoughts as we transition into a new era of health care delivery on the island. E-mail me and the Governing Board at ExecAsst@gchd.org and/or ask to speak at one of the upcoming board meetings. Meeting dates are posted at www.CoastalHW.org.

Harlan "Mark" Guidry, MD, is the chief executive officer of the Galveston County Health District and Coastal Health & Wellness, positions he's held since 2003.

About Coastal Health & Wellness

Coastal Health & Wellness (CHW) is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) that provides primary care, counseling, and dental services for Galveston County residents through federal and county funding along with patient fees. Under federal guidelines, an 11 member policy-making board, comprised of a consumer majority, sets policies for the clinics. CHW operations are executed by the Galveston County Health District which also oversees EMS and other traditional public health services. Having a FQHC in Galveston County leverages county dollars funding indigent primary healthcare. Learn more about CHW at www.CoastalHW.org.

About the Galveston County Health District

The Galveston County Health District (GCHD) is a distinct governmental entity and is unique as it oversees two major operations under two separate and distinct policy-making boards: (1) the United Board of Health appointed by Galveston County and cities to set policy for health department services and (2) the Coastal Health & Wellness Governing Board, on which the majority of members are consumers who set policy for the FQHC operations in accordance with federal requirements. Additionally, the district oversees services under three distinct tax ID's: Galveston County Health District, which funds services related to public health, animal control, financial screening for the Galveston County indigent healthcare program, and air and water monitoring services. Coastal Health & Wellness, which provides medical, dental and mental health counseling services to Galveston County residents, and Galveston Area Ambulance Authority which provides emergency and non-emergency ambulance services to contracted agencies within Galveston County. Learn more about GCHD at www.GCHD.org.

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