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MY VIEW GARY GIBLIN

A year after crisis, La Familia is recovering

By Gary Giblin

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At about this time one year ago, La Familia Medical Center was in the throes of a convulsive week, following months of divisiveness and drama. A perfect storm of shrinking federal subsidies and poor management issues had jeopardized the very existence of a health care organization that serves 1 of every 10 residents in Santa Fe County and the homeless population of our city. In my 28 years at La Familia, I had never seen it so bleak. Today, people routinely ask me how things are going and I am happy to report that we are doing not only OK, but we are moving forward.

Here are some of the highlights of the last year:

- After losing eight medical providers and two dentists, we have been able to recruit five physicians, one nurse practitioner and two dentists. Our monthly visits have been increasing steadily as these new providers are onboarded.
- Anchorum Foundation has been a generous supporter of our organization, offering managerial expertise and guidance. Through the foundation's generosity, we have the strongest financial team in years. Without this help, we could not be growing again.
- La Familia continues teaching family medicine residents, many of whom stay in Santa Fe after they graduate. We have also become a training site for the University of New Mexico Family Nurse Practitioner program. The dental clinic has commitments for two residents for this year as well and continues to train dental assistants at the community college.
- Our pharmacy team has transitioned to a 340-B program; after several years of planning, they carried us over the finish line and now our pharmacy is able to offer even lower costs to our patients as well as provide a source of income.

- Our diabetes plan continues to offer excellent education and support and is a role model for other Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- Our doctors are returning to offer delivery service to our prenatal patients and have been providing essential backup services for Christus Women's Care Specialists in the meantime.
- Lastly, the people of Santa Fe came through for us in a big way, donating more than \$400,000 to get us through our darkest days.

The above-mentioned progress has been a team effort of our board, new management and providers. However, the true all-stars have been our wonderful, dedicated support staff who stood by us even when they had layoffs and temporary pay cuts. Their dedication and sacrifice has brought us to where we are.

That being said, there is a lot more work to do, as navigating a health care system based on a for-profit model means we are not entirely out of the woods.

Providing care to Medicaid/Medicare/uninsured patients continues to be a challenge. A survey of 420 Federally Qualified Health Centers' by the National Association of Community Health Centers in 2023, found that 85% expected financial strains from decreasing Medicaid enrollments/COVID funding and 50% expected to reduce staffing and services. A recent article ("Clinics that accept all patients are struggling," Aug. 5) pointed out that three of the largest such centers in the state — First Choice (Albuquerque), Health Centers of Northern New Mexico (Española/La Vegas) and La Familia all are facing financial deficits this year.

As I said before, La Familia Medical Center is doing relatively well. With additional support, we could be doing so much better. For those who have stepped in and helped us this last year, there are not enough words to express our appreciation for your trust in our work. With our community's support, our future is brighter every day. My hope is that the federal, state, county and city governments recognize it is in our collective interest to come up with long-term solutions.

Dr. Gary Giblin is chief medical officer at La Familia Health, where he has practiced for over 28 years.