

# TMO leaders from St. Anne community win new dialysis clinic for uninsured

HOUSTON - As the result of a the tragic death of an uninsured member of the community, uninsured residents of that man's community will soon have a new dialysis clinic at the Riverside Clinic.

"My brother Antonio had severe kidney failure, but he repeatedly was turned away from the emergency room when he needed dialysis," explained Manuela Sanchez, a parishioner at St. Anne Church. "He was bloated, vomiting, and couldn't breathe. But his potassium levels weren't high enough, so they sent us away."

In 2003 Antonio Sanchez died because he could not get access to dialysis.

Outraged and saddened by her brother's death, Manuela became involved with The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) at her parish. Together with Father Paul English, C.S.B, who works mostly with the Hispanic Community at St. Anne, and other TMO leaders at the parish, they resolved to take action.

They are getting results that will have lasting changes for dialysis care, and for healthcare more generally, in Harris County for years to come.

After Manuela first told her brother's story to other parishioners at a TMO meeting at St. Anne Catholic Community, the TMO Core Team at St. Anne started a process of research to learn more about the dialysis situation in the county and what they could do about it. The effort was led by Father English and parishioner Rebecca Schneider, Baylor medical student who had seen the dialysis situation up close during her medical residency years.

They met with Dr. David Sheikh-Hamad, Chief of Renal Services of Ben Taub Hospital, and what they found out was astounding. Not only was the county's practice of rationing dialysis inhumane, leaving people like Sanchez in misery that sometimes leads even to death. It was wasting millions of dollars per year.

According to a study that Dr. Sheikh-Hamad had conducted, the cost of treating chronic dialysis patients through the emergency room is \$284,000 per patient per year. To treat patients with the same illness outside of the emergency room through scheduled care costs \$76,906 per patient per year, a difference of over \$207,000 per patient per year. There were 32 patients currently receiving emergency dialysis instead of scheduled dialysis, meaning the hospital district was wasting a total of \$6.8 million per year.

Armed with these facts and the tragedy of Manuela's brother, Schneider and the TMO team met with Evans Atwell, the Chair of the Harris County Hospital District Board of Managers. Atwell promised them he would look into the situation.

Three months later, the TMO team at St. Anne counted their most significant victory to date - a new dialysis clinic at the Riverside Clinic that would expand dialysis care in Harris County by 87 percent, while simultaneously saving taxpayers \$900,000 per year in direct costs, and more than \$5.2 million per year in indirect costs.

"These are astounding numbers," said Dr. Guy Clifton, Professor of Neurosurgery at UT Medical School and Chairman of Save Our ERs. "That money would be enough to leverage federal funding to support three fully-functioning federally-qualified health clinics, which could see 150,000 patient visits per year. It also would be enough to pay the State's portion of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to provide health insurance to 10,000 children."

On Thursday, February 23rd, Father English, Manuela Sanchez and other TMO leaders addressed the Harris County Hospital District Board, to recognize Atwell and the other board members for opening the new dialysis clinic.

But they are also pushing for one additional step to increase access to dialysis and save taxpayer money. The hospital district still refuses to provide scheduled dialysis to a handful of patients who are ineligible for the Gold Card because of their immigration status. "There are only seven or eight patients in this category, but by refusing them care, the hospital district still is wasting \$1.6 million per year," said Father English. "The Hospital District has gone 80 percent of the way; we want them to go the full 100 percent."

"I think what we've been able to do is a lesson on two fronts," said Father English, who helped bring his parish into TMO just over a year ago. "First, it's a lesson that healthcare is both more humane and much, much less expensive when it's provided on a preventative basis, instead of in the emergency rooms. And second, it's a lesson in what can be accomplished when communities act on their faith values and organize for change."

"I feel hopeful about what we've been able to do," said Manuela Sanchez. "Through our work, it's as though my brother's death will mean life for many

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