

March Healthcare Campus: A Needed Development

Most of you have heard of my medical condition, ALS/PLS but you have not heard of my working history in the healthcare field which began in 1970 at Kaiser Permanente in Fontana. I was hired, because of my knowledge of the community and ability to organize, to help enroll 500 low income families without health insurance into a middle class healthcare delivery system. After we enrolled the families and the program was operational, it became clear to me that healthcare was a valuable resource to everyone regardless of income.

I found many people who had insurance (not with Kaiser), but no access to physicians. I found people saying they could not be put in the hospital because there was a shortage of beds. I found Hispanic families with health coverage but due to language barriers had to seek care from certain doctors in Colton that spoke Spanish. I remember the late Dr. Howard Inghram telling me he taught himself Spanish so he could care for this population. I came in contact with them because they were looking for access to healthcare providers that understood their situation and needs.

At the time, Kaiser was experiencing the need to participate in one of the major issues facing our community and nation: affordable healthcare within reasonable proximity to home. Now, the Inland Empire has grown in population but our healthcare institutions have lagged behind in facilities and healthcare providers (especially Blacks and Hispanics). Even Kaiser has expanded from one medical center in Fontana to Riverside, Moreno Valley, Coachella Valley and the high desert.

During that time I also remember when we could not locate qualified educated professional workers in America, we brought them in from other countries. In some cases, special training was done for certain careers using federal job training dollars. In the case of Kaiser, special nursing programs were established with outside private training organizations.

Now through the March Healthcare Campus we find ourselves with the opportunity to get ahead of the curve in healthcare facilities, career training, and research to prevent some of the problems of the past. We have experienced tremendous population growth over the past 25 years and it is going to continue upward. Our population is growing in age and that brings on greater need for good accessible facilities. We have a trainable workforce with an abundance of educational institutions to assist in that area, keeping our students from having to seek opportunities elsewhere.

We also have the opportunity to address the hospital bed shortage and develop a community hospital in a part of our region that sorely needs one. And I personally know how important location and proximity are when it comes to healthcare. Several years ago, I passed out at home and the emergency team arrived but due to my condition it was determined I would not make it to Kaiser Fontana. San

Bernardino Community Hospital was just a few blocks from my home so they took me there. I was given excellent care for the next four days and then released. Another time I was at Bally's Total Fitness trying to keep my muscles stretched and found myself in need of emergency care. Once again because of my condition it was determined Kaiser Fontana was too far away so I was sent to Loma Linda Hospital where I received excellent care. Once I was stable for transporting, Kaiser Fontana had no available beds so off I went to Kaiser Riverside for three days of excellent care.

Even though I had excellent health insurance, close access was imperative.

We have the opportunity to support a first rate state of the art medical campus at March Air Reserve Base that will serve our region well while producing good paying jobs, quality healthcare, and needed educational opportunities.