

Isha Care: Free Healthcare Clinic Launched in Underserved Rural Tennessee

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Isha Foundation through its Action for Rural Rejuvenation project has been active in providing free medical care in rural areas of South India for the past five years, and recently also in Sierra Leone, Africa – all notably underdeveloped regions. But even in wealthy countries like the United States, affordable medical care is not accessible to everyone. Tennessee for example, the US state the Isha Institute of Inner Sciences is located in, is at the bottom of the scale when it comes to the health of its residents, ranking 47th out of 50 states. With 800,000 Tennesseans uninsured and growing incidence of diabetes, hypertension and obesity, the need to offer disease prevention programs and early diagnostic services becomes imperative.

As part of its overall effort to improve well-being, the Isha Institute of Inner Sciences has opened Isha Care – a free medical clinic offering primary healthcare to the rural, uninsured and underserved populations of Van Buren, Warren and Sequatchie counties. With the support and assistance of many community leaders and numerous area businesses, the Isha Care clinic has officially opened its doors on 23 September 2008.

Dr. Kalpana Rajdev, directing physician of the new Isha Care free clinic, is a retired family practice physician and geriatric specialist with over thirty years experience in clinical service settings and a full-time volunteer with Isha Foundation who relocated to the McMinnville area with her husband three years ago. Finding out about the shocking statistics of unpaid medical bills burdening local healthcare facilities and doing some follow-up research about the state of healthcare in the surrounding counties sparked the idea to create a free clinic. In cooperation with the Foundation and community leaders, the project quickly took off.



Howard Kirksey, III, Senior Vice President of The Bank of Tullahoma was instrumental in first bringing the concept of Isha Care to local business leaders. "I am honored to have been asked to be a part of this venture. The generous nature of the people involved with Isha Foundation that have offered to provide a source of basic healthcare to the uninsurable in the community is an example we should all embrace."



As the Foundation's Action for Rural Rejuvenation (ARR) in India and Africa, Isha Care is also a nonprofit, volunteer-run, free medical service, requiring community support and individual volunteerism to be a success. "In order to operate at the scale that is truly needed to serve the local communities effectively, we will need certified physicians and nurse practitioners who can volunteer their time, medical suppliers and facilities who can offer in-kind donations, and benefactors from the local community who can offer financial support," explained Isha Foundation volunteer Virginia Emerson, J.D., CRNA, a nurse and professional health care consultant. Dr. Rajdev anticipates rapid growth for the Isha Care clinic based on the eager response she has received from the community so far. "I am so excited we are able to offer care to a population that so desperately needs it," said Dr. Rajdev. "I have been truly inspired by the enthusiasm and generous support of our neighbors, local businesses, and community leaders without whom Isha Care could not happen."

At its temporary home in a community center adjacent to the Harrison Ferry Mountain Volunteer Fire Department, Isha Care will provide limited primary healthcare service with a focus on preventative and ongoing care as well as awareness programs. Physician services will be free of cost. Once Isha Care is re-established in its own, larger facility, the clinic will be able to accommodate additional volunteer doctors and nurse practitioners, as well as exam rooms and diagnostic equipment. Isha Care volunteer practitioners will conduct primarily patient examinations. In the future, the clinic plans to offer specialty diagnostic clinics and educational seminars for patients.



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