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Retired doctor aides rural community

Tenn.'s Isha Care Clinic targets increased service

By Jen Richman

MCMINNVILLE, Tenn. - After two years of retirement, Dr. Kalpana Rajdev, 58, formerly a medical director of two nursing homes with more than two decades of medical experience behind her, reached into an extensive medical background that also included general practice and work in geriatrics, and came up with a plan to combat what she believes is a gap in medical services in her rural Tennessee community.



Dr. Kalpana Rajdev, above, who retired two years ago, has thrown her passion into helping run and expand the Isha Care Clinic which serves a rural Tennessee region. Photo courtesy of Kalpana Rajdev

Rajdev's still evolving plan involves utilizing the power of community resources to expand a health-care facility in McMinnville, a rural town 65 miles south of Nashville, through the Isha Care Clinic, an initiative of the Isha Foundation - a nonprofit that promotes health, education and environmental causes through its programs that operate in the United States and India.

Rajdev's work with the clinic involves delivering small-scale services to nearby Warren and Van Buren counties.

In 2006, what she found upon joining the community of McMinnville caused Rajdev to reevaluate her retirement plans because of what, she says, is a "segment that doesn't have anywhere to go" - a reference to the number of low-income families in the region. She likens health-care expenditures to a "chronic ailment," one that she, along with a band of steady volunteers, hope to improve.

"Chronic care is what we should target," Rajdev said because she believes that her neighbors and the community-at-large will ultimately be healthier physically and financially by investigating a long-term solution rather than a more shortsighted approach of waiting until an illness worsens, landing them in the emergency room.

Currently the clinic occupies only a small room in McMinnville's community center. A separate space for an exam room with donated curtains partitions it off from the remainder of the room: a waiting room and nurse's station. Ultimately, Rajdev says the clinic will soon move from its current cramped location into a space that can facilitate the use of an x-ray machine and equipment that will accommodate routine screenings for women. She hopes to extend the clinic's hours from its current weekends-only schedule to offer weekday services.

The clinic currently treats patients with Diabetes and high blood pressure, two prevalent chronic conditions, which if treated early enough and on a consistent basis, can prevent more costly measures down the line, according to Rajdev. Patients must be working at least 20 hours per week in order to qualify for services at the clinic, a detail Rajdev feels is an important one. She says the clinic's aim is to serve those who are making an attempt at meeting their own health-care needs, but because of a sour economy are having trouble doing this on their own. The care clinic has been seeing patients since late September, and Rajdev been working to enlarge and improve the existing model of health-care she is able to offer.

Rajdev took on administrative help from a volunteer.

In addition to the two women, there is a team of about a dozen rotating nurses.

Disappointed in the clinic's temporary location, Rajdev admits that the space is not entirely suitable for medical practice.

A new clinic is underway near its current location in McMinnville, but according to Rajdev, is at least six months from opening. Time is proving to be as valuable as money as the clinic finds its operational footing.

"We are providing what we can, office-based," she said. However, the local community is stepping up to help find a better location for the clinic. The contractor commissioned to build the new clinic is forgoing his usual 10 percent commission in order to help the project along.

Rajdev has sought the support of the community, making a dozen presentations to local companies. "We're hoping this will turn into financial support," said Kalpana, who admits she has yet to target a specific donor.

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Rajdev's education, which she said "kept evolving over a majority of time," resulted in a medical degree in 1972 at the MP Shah Medical College in Jammagar, India.

Born in Gujarat, Rajdev moved to the United States in the early 1970s at the age of 23 because, she said, the educational system in the United States had more opportunities. Rajdev completed a residency in 1974 in pathology from the Providence Medical Center in Portland, Oregon.

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