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**South Lake Health Clinic seeing increase in need for health care**

**Clermont, Fla.** – The South Lake Health Clinic has seen an increase in need for primary health care for uninsured residents of south Lake County over the past few years.

The purpose of the South Lake Health Clinic is to provide primary health care, including prescription assistance programs, at no cost to uninsured residents of south Lake County whose income is at 100 to 150 percent of the poverty level. Due to the continually increasing population in south Lake County and the number of uninsured residents, the number of patients served has grown over 30 percent in the past two years.

“When I moved here I didn’t have a job with benefits,” commented South Lake resident Saharazed Ally. “It was important that I was able to receive preventative health care. I don’t know what I would do without the clinic. The physicians and other volunteers are wonderful people who really care about their community.”

Ally, like other individuals, has been unable to find employment that provides health benefits, continuing the need for primary health care through volunteer primary health clinics.

“In the past year or so, the waiting time between appointments has grown quite a bit,” added Ally. “I used to be able to schedule my appointments a few weeks in advance but now with the economy so bad, there are so many more people needing to utilize the clinic and they are booking appointments further out. It would be wonderful to see more physicians volunteer to help see all of us that have no where else to go.”

The clinic, sponsored by South Lake Hospital, is a not for profit entity and participates with licensed health care providers under contract with the Department of Health Volunteer Health Care Provider Program. The clinic is a volunteer primary care clinic, meaning it relies on physicians, nurse

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practitioners, nurses and clerical volunteers to be able to treat patients. With the increase in patients in recent years, the demand for volunteer physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses is greater than ever.

“The economy has had a large impact on our patient numbers,” commented clinic volunteer nurse practitioner Debi Hunt, MSN, ARNP-BC. “I have been volunteering here for seven years and we have never seen the need greater than it is now.”

“We get people in here everyday that tell us they never thought they would be in their current situation. The volume of people that need our help keeps growing but without the help of medical professionals, we can only serve so many at one time,” added Hunt. “I am a nursing instructor at the University of Central Florida and one of our main focuses while teaching is community awareness and involvement. I practice what I teach and hope that I can encourage students and other medical professionals to do the same. There are a lot of people that need our help right here in our community.”

Currently, the largest need is for physicians and nurse practitioners that practice family medicine, internal medicine and primary care. While the hope is to have a physician pledge to volunteer two hours per week, the scheduling is flexible and physicians can choose how many hours they wish to volunteer, either a certain amount per week, every other week or per month. Specialty physicians are also needed in every field including cardiologists, neurologists, women’s health and orthopedics and can be utilized once a month or even once a quarter.

Specialists can have the patients come directly to their offices for treatment as well for ease of scheduling.

“I began volunteering at the clinic nearly two years ago when I opened my practice in south Lake County,” commented Shazia Nasir, MD, who practices internal medicine at South Lake Medical Center. “I promised myself that no matter how busy my practice got, I would never give up volunteering. I feel it is part of my responsibility as a business owner in the community to give back. Plus, it is a great atmosphere here. You are able to help those that really need it and everyone is so grateful.”

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“The clinic provides an invaluable service to our community,” said Nasir. “We are able to provide primary care, labs, testing and monitor the patients to prevent serious illnesses that they otherwise might not be able to prevent and then they would end up in an even worse situation.”

“The main issue facing the clinic right now is lack of help from physicians and nurse practitioners,” Nasir continued. “It is my personal philosophy that everyone, no matter what their situation, should volunteer some where one way or another. This is a wonderful place for medical professionals. It doesn’t take a huge commitment, just a few hours per month. The benefit to our community and the feeling you receive by helping people is immeasurable.”

Physicians that are interested in volunteering can contact the clinic at 352.243.6280.

Additional eligibility requirements for patients other than having an income at 100 to 150 percent of the poverty level include being a resident of south Lake County including the residents of Minneola, Clermont, Groveland, Mascotte and Montverde with proof of residency for three months or longer, being 18 years or older, having no health insurance, having a non-emergency medical problem, not being under the care of a physician or another clinic and showing proof of income for one month for yourself and your spouse.

The clinic is open Monday through Wednesday and is located at 835 Seventh Street, Building B, Suite #4. Patients are seen by appointment only. For more information on the South Lake Health Clinic, please call 352.243.6280.

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*Photo available upon request*

