SMHC and Ecuador join to help Twin Cities Ecuadorians

In a groundbreaking agreement signed at the Ecuadorian Consulate in Minneapolis, Minnesota on February 14, 2013, the country of Ecuador is joining forces with St. Mary’s Health Clinics (SMHC) to help address the health needs of Ecuadorian foreign nationals living and working in Minnesota, particularly in the Twin Cities.

SMHC will set up a health resource center within the Minneapolis-based Ecuadorian Consulate. There, Ecuadorian citizens will receive health education, health screenings and, if required, referrals for available programs or free health care through SMHC. The center is expected to open in March 2013.

“This is the first agreement of this kind in the United States,” says Silvia Ontaneda, Consul General of Ecuador. “With the goal of improving the physical and mental health of Ecuadorian citizens, our hope is that this will become a model that will help us meet the needs of our Citizens wherever they are.”

Prior to the signing, Consul General Ontaneda commented on the sense of hope current discussions of immigration reform in the United States are having on the Ecuadorian community. “Too often, people from my county will not seek care when their health is in danger. They would choose death rather than go for emergency care that might lead to deportation, incarceration or excessive financial burdens.” A strongly Catholic country, Consul General Ontaneda believes SMHC’s Catholic roots and a trust in the ministries founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, will make the service more easily approachable by Ecuadorians. She estimates that there are almost 40,000 people from Ecuador residing in the Twin Cities area.

“We recognize that there are many people in the Twin Cities area unfamiliar with available healthcare options or who are not and will not be covered by the Affordable Care Act,” comments Barbara Dickie, SMHC executive director. “Using our extensive volunteer clinic network, SMHC can help reduce emergency room and other uncovered healthcare costs by providing services and education to people before issues become dire and/or exorbitantly costly.”

SMHC has provided necessary and accessible health series to the medically uninsured and underserved since 1992.

Thursday, February 14, 2013

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Catholic Spirit reporter Diane Towalski interviews Silvia Ontaneda, Consul General of Ecuador, on issues facing Ecuadorian foreign nationals living and working in Minnesota.

Consul General Ontaneda and SMHC Executive Director Barbara Dickie sign an agreement to set up a health resource center within the Minneapolis-based Ecuadorian Consulate.

SMHC Community Outreach Manager Cristina Flood Urdangarin, Consul General Silvia Ontaneda, and SMHC Executive Director Barbara Dickie stand in front of the flag of Ecuador. Consul General Ontaneda informed those present that the flag was handmade by Sisters in Ecuador.

Consul General Silvia Ontaneda, Cristina Flood Urdangarin, and Barbara Dickie toast the newly formed partnership between St. Mary’s Health Clinics and the country of Ecuador.