



OP-ED / PRESS RELEASE – TOMAGWA HealthCare Ministries

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SUBJECT: The Affordable Healthcare Myth: Real Life in a Safety Net Clinic

“Why do we need charity clinics like TOMAGWA?” the caller on the other end of the phone asked. “Doesn’t everyone have health insurance now? Why should I send my money to your clinic if everybody has Blue Cross/Blue Shield?”

The phone call was sad, as well as disturbing. The disturbing thing is that far too many Americans, many right here in our own community, believe that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has eliminated the need for the nation’s extensive network of safety net clinics like TOMAGWA HealthCare Ministries, headquartered in Tomball, Texas. Many people think that the uninsured, working poor in our community have all been assimilated or absorbed into the federal government’s insurance marketplace, which somehow absolves us all of our humanitarian responsibility to provide for the least of God’s people. And it’s no wonder that vast numbers of our fellow citizens believe that way because, since day one of its release, we were told, over and over again, that everyone would be covered and at little or no cost to the insured. However, time has revealed the truth; “affordable” is anything but, and that truth has never been more evident than in TOMAGWA clinics.

A look inside the TOMAGWA clinic waiting room, on any given weekday, reveals a vastly different story than the one we are being told. Instead of fewer patients seeking access to charity medical care, there are more patients than ever before; twice as many as this time last year. Not only are there more, but, in addition to the usual working poor, there is now a new breed of safety net patient – the newly uninsured, newly unemployed and the newly part-time; all products of the current healthcare climate’s effect on employers.

“When I lost my company’s insurance, I signed up for the insurance through the government website,” said one TOMAGWA patient. “I was told that it was affordable, and that I had to sign up, so I did. I got a little help with the insurance premium, but it was still more expensive than my old insurance. But that wasn’t the worst part. When I went to a doctor that was supposed to take my insurance, I was told I had to pay out-of-pocket because I had a \$4,000 deductible to meet. I dropped the coverage because I can’t afford it. My family has to eat, you know?”

The patient’s experience is representative of TOMAGWA’s patient base, many of whom are forced to choose between medicine and groceries. The sad truth of the ACA is the unintended consequences: reduced access to practitioners; loss of effective employer-subsidized insurance coverage; higher premiums; higher deductibles; reduction in work hours resulting in disqualification for benefits, and layoffs.

Perhaps the most devastating unintended consequence is the perpetuation of the myth that charity clinics are somehow no longer needed, resulting in reduced or stagnant revenue to care for patients. The community hospitals in TOMAGWA’s service area hemorrhage millions of dollars a month from their emergency rooms in unpaid medical bills for non-emergent care. If everyone indeed has coverage, why is this continuing? If everyone is covered, why has TOMAGWA’s patient load doubled? The truth is that everyone is NOT covered by the ACA’s program because the typical TOMAGWA patient simply cannot afford even the lowest level of the ACA offerings.

So, to answer the caller’s question, people should fund safety net clinics like TOMAGWA because safety net clinics provide the working poor, and the new wave of uninsured, unemployed patients, with healthcare at a rate more than fifteen times cheaper than your local hospital emergency room. In TOMAGWA’s service area, that’s more than \$25 million in savings to the community. People should support safety net clinics like TOMAGWA because TOMAGWA is 100% community funded; no government funding, no Medicare or Medicaid accepted. We should support safety net clinics like TOMAGWA because their patients are our neighbors in need, and because we are all called by God to feed the hungry, heal the sick and minister to the least of God’s people. It’s just the right thing to do. But, beyond all the aforementioned reasons why we, as a community, should support TOMAGWA HealthCare Ministries, the most pressing reason is because TOMAGWA is so much more than just a medical home to thousands of families in crisis; TOMAGWA is a shining beacon of hope to a fallen and hurting world; TOMAGWA is a sanctuary set apart for the healing of broken bodies, broken minds, and broken hearts. It is a gathering point, an intersection, where the spiritually weak and physically afflicted cross paths with the grace of Jesus Christ through the hands of ministers of mercy, who work tirelessly for all those in our community that have a desperate need for a healing touch, an encouraging word and a compassionate heart. And all of it dedicated to the Glory of God.

TOMAGWA and safety net clinics across America are inundated with the increased demand for their services. Increased community support is needed, right now, to meet the demand. The alternative is to allow our community hospital emergency rooms to be flooded with non-emergent

patients seeking care, the most costly kind of healthcare, the kind that the rest of the community will have to pay for through higher medical costs, longer waits in the ER, higher taxes and even higher insurance premiums. When you weigh the alternative, cost-effective safety net clinics like TOMAGWA just make sense. Support your local safety net clinic. To support TOMAGWA, give online at www.tomagwa.org or send a check to 455 School Street, Suite 30, Tomball, Texas 77375. To see the ministry for yourself, call Tami Sabey to arrange a tour; direct 832-559-5222.

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