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Clinic that treats the poor for free finds itself in need

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ARLINGTON

*The Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex clinic needs volunteer doctors and donated supplies.

ARLINGTON -- Yanira and Ernie Arevalo arrived at the Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex medical clinic at 5 a.m. Wednesday, four hours before it opened, to get free medicine and treatment for their diabetes.

The nonprofit's clinic provides service, first-come, first-served, to low-income and homeless people in the Arlington area. But with a shortage of volunteer medical personnel, the clinic can see only about 25 adults and children a day, Director Andrea Wilson said.

Dozens are turned away.

"We're never able to see all the patients that want to be seen," Wilson said.

So it's not unusual for people like the Arevalos to arrive at the downtown Arlington clinic hours before it opens. The couple, who make about \$1,300 a month and have no insurance, wanted to be first.

Ernie Arevalo, 36, almost lost his foot once to an ulcer and is beginning to develop another. His wife needed refills of her diabetes medication.

"Right now it's a godsend to have Mission Arlington," said Yanira Arevalo, 32.

The clinic, which opens at 9 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and 6 p.m. Tuesdays, relies on volunteer doctors and nurses.

Besides general practitioners, the clinic needs more volunteer specialists, including a pathologist. Wilson said volunteers don't have to make long-term commitments and can come for as little as an hour.

The clinic is also struggling with shortages of medicine and equipment. It needs an electrocardiogram machine, Wilson said.

Physician assistant Doug Blake, who retired from Lockheed Martin and volunteers 32 hours a week, said some of the clinic's greatest needs are diabetes medicine and antibiotics for infections, like the one on Ernie Arevalo's foot.

"We have to treat it aggressively. It's pretty deadly for a diabetic," said Blake, who treated the Arevalos on Wednesday.

Minh Le, a doctor, began volunteering while he was in medical school. He said he enjoys working there in his spare time because the patients are friendly and grateful. Le said he believes that other doctors would find the experience rewarding.

"They should give it a try once, and I know for sure they will come back," Le said. "I did."

Free clinic

The Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex clinic provides free medical treatment to low-income and homeless people from Arlington and surrounding communities. Treatment is provided first-come, first-served, and the clinic relies on volunteer medical staff.

210 W. South St. in downtown Arlington

9 a.m.-noon Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 6-9 p.m. Tuesdays

To volunteer or make a donation, call Andrea Wilson at 817-277-9597 or visit www.missionarlington.org.

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