

Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center

By Luke Sprunger

The Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center was established in 1975 to provide treatment for Spanish-speaking patients, immigrants, and others living in Washington and Yamhill Counties who had no insurance or money to pay their hospital bills. The center has grown from a single doctor's office, located in a converted three-car garage, to a health organization comprised of eighteen clinics with over five hundred employees that serve over 52,000 patients in 2023. Serving more patients in languages other than English than any other community health care center in the state, the center is essential to the local immigrant community.

The center had its beginnings when six-year-old Virginia García, the daughter of a migrant family, developed septicemia, a viral blood disease she contracted after stepping on a rusty nail. Virginia was denied treatment at a community hospital for lack of health insurance, and she was eventually treated at St. Vincent Hospital. Her parents were not given instructions in Spanish of how and when to give her the prescribed medicine to fight the infection, however, and Virginia died.

As the news spread through the Latino community about Virginia's death, members of Centro Cultural of Washington County, a cultural center in Cornelius that served Latinos in the area, worked to remedy the lack of medical coverage for migrant families who had no insurance or could not pay for health care. Arturo Cortez, the executive director of Centro Cultural, led the effort to open the clinic, and he and others converted a garage in Cornelius into a makeshift clinic. Partnering with Tuality Community Hospital and St. Vincent Hospital, Centro Cultural established the Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center within weeks of Virginia's death.

Over the years, volunteers, donors, and staff kept the clinic going through difficult times. When aid organizations serving Latinos and other migrants closed their doors after the loss of state and federal funding in the 1980s, the health center survived and grew. The Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center currently provides health and dental care, wellness education, camps for children, and fitness programs at twelve primary clinics, pharmacies, dentist offices, and school health centers. A mobile clinic serves patients from a variety of cultural backgrounds at schools, migrant camps, and seasonal workplaces.

The Health Center receives support from the Virginia Garcia Memorial Foundation, which funds the center through state grants and corporate, public, and individual donations.

Sources

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