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HUFFPOST HEALTHY LIVING

A California Love Story: Obamacare Has Hearts Pumping in Santa Cruz

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The Affordable Care Act is being bullied on the playground. The website isn't as smart and fast as all the kids would like it to be. Bad "Obamacare." Go sit in the corner. No one wants to play with you.

But wait. Someone is running across the schoolyard to say she'll be the new kid's best friend. She genuinely likes Obamacare because it is making a difference in her world.

Dr. Maria Mead is the Medical Director of one of the country's most renowned women's clinic. The Santa Cruz Women's Health Center has been around since 1974, and services over 5,000 patients a year in Santa Cruz County. They serve many of California's most underserved populations, including undocumented and homeless people.

Dr. Mead can't even curb the outpouring of enthusiasm she has for the Affordable Care Act. It will, without a doubt, help her better serve her clinic's patients.

For instance, many of their patients are on Medicaid, and that coverage is expanding with fewer restrictions and full benefit qualification with an income up to 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. People with income 139 percent to 400 percent of the poverty line get great rates and tax credits to help them buy care on the exchange.

The stories of website crashes or customer service delays don't squelch the clinic's Medical Director's enthusiasm one bit. She is too thrilled with the numbers: "As of last week, over two million people had visited the Covered California site and over 179,562 applications were started."

The Santa Cruz Women's Health Center's two enrollment specialists, Ursula Montesinos and Edgar Ontiveros, have front and center placement on their website and physically at the clinic. They -- and all the staff at the clinic -- are aligned in the intention and passion to educate the clinic's patients about their options and to get everyone signed up. Their mission is to register 1,600 of their patients for health care under the ACA by the end of March.

Mead says this isn't only good news for her clinic which is doubling in size in 2014 to serve twice as many patients: "This is really great news for California. The ACA is going to save the state so much money. It's similar to when Santa Cruz started insuring kids through a locally funded coverage program and the county saved nearly \$1 million in preventable hospitalizations in the first year alone. Kids were getting the essential, on-going primary care they needed, and that will

always be a money saving tactic."

Dr. Mead gets straight to the heart of the ACA when she says "We are empowering people to know that they are important."

The patients of this clinic are from communities that historically have been excluded from access to resources like health care. Healing their patients and providing quality health services is what they are about. They do it with passion, as their mission statement says "advocating the feminist goals of social, political and economic equality."

When your mission statement aligns with Obamacare, and you get to make your patients feel empowered to manage -- perhaps for the first time ever -- their own health care coverage, that's a nice little love story on the health care playground. And it can't be the only crush out there.

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