

The Frederick News-Post

January 10, 2006

Surgeon General Praises Area Clinic

By Kate Leslie
News-Post Staff

FREDERICK -- Of the thousands of invitations received by the U.S. surgeon general each year, Vice Adm. Richard H. Carmona said an invite to Mission of Mercy's Mobile Medical Clinic stood out.

Dr. Carmona toured the mobile operation at Frederick Church of the Brethren on Monday. The clinic provides free medical, dental and prescription coverage to thousands of Frederick County residents each year.

"What inspired me most is when I saw that the only clearance to come here is a need. There's no paperwork, there's no qualification, and what's dispensed here is not as much care as it is love and dignity for a fellow human being," Dr. Carmona said.

Founded in 1994 by Gianna Talone-Sullivan, Mission of Mercy is a nonprofit organization that provides free care to the working poor in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Arizona. Locally, the mission holds clinics in Frederick, Brunswick, Mount Airy and Thurmont.

Dr. Carmona, who has been surgeon general since 2002, said Mission of Mercy resonated with his experiences growing up poor in Manhattan. A son of Puerto Rican immigrants, Dr. Carmona said he was homeless by age 6, and health care was not an option.

"I hurt for the common man. I know what's it like to be hungry

and not have health care and not know where your next meal will come from, and to not know if your children will be cared for," he said. "... So to have this kind of light out here that represents hope for them is just wonderful."

During his tour, Dr. Carmona chatted with volunteers and patients, often conversing in Spanish. At the dental services area, dentist George Waxter joked that Mission of Mercy would be glad to offer the surgeon general a job after he completes his duties in Washington.

Dr. Waxter, who has volunteered with Mission of Mercy for almost 10 years, said he was impressed that Dr. Carmona took the time "to get in the trenches."

Mission of Mercy relies solely upon private funding and grants to operate the clinics. Nationally, Mission of Mercy served almost 21,000 patients at 13 clinics between Aug. 1, 2004 and Sept. 30, 2005, according to their importantly, prayer is at the core of everything we do."

The center has provided medical care to more than 12,250 people in Frederick city since the clinic's inception in 1998. It has provided dental care to more than 1,300. The mission has operated clinics in Frederick County since 1994.

Ms. Sullivan said Mission of Mercy largely serves the uninsured, though some patients are considered under-insured.

"They are the working poor, the people who fall through the cracks," she said, adding that the center has served people from more than 40 countries, and is making plans to offer clinics in

Louisiana, Texas, and possibly Nigeria.

It is the hope of Mission of Mercy that their model be replicated.

"We have a product and the product works," Dr. Sullivan said. "We have the continuity of care, we're volunteer driven and most importantly, prayer is at the core of everything we do."

Dr. Carmona said he hopes other organizations replicate the Mission of Mercy model, though doing so under the federal government's auspices isn't likely.

"With federal dollars, there are encumbrances that don't allow you to be so entrepreneurial," he said. "We couldn't replicate something like this even with dollars, because this really bespeaks more about commitment from the community, from a group of advocates who have a passion for their fellow man. You can't buy that. You can't salary that."



Dr. Carmona with Drs. Gianna and Michael Sullivan at a Mission of Mercy reception honoring his visit.

Reprinted with permission of The Frederick News-Post and Randall Family LLC as published on January 10, 2006.