

## Volunteering Is in Her Heart

A medical assistant who volunteers at a clinic for the uninsured embodies the Kaiser Permanente ethos of community service. Pictured at left, Maria Martinez Resendiz teaches Carisa Swason how to conduct a blood sugar test at the RotaCare Richmond Free Medical Clinic.

Giving back to your community, even if you don't have enough for yourself, is a family value Maria Martinez Resendiz learned from her parents.

For the last 4 years, the 26-year-old medical assistant at the Kaiser Permanente Richmond Medical Center has volunteered on Tuesday afternoons at the RotaCare Richmond Free Medical Clinic at the West Contra Costa Family Justice Center.

"Despite growing up in a low-income immigrant family, one thing my parents always taught us was to give back," said Martinez Resendiz, a Richmond native who is hoping to draw more badly needed volunteers to the clinic. "Those were the values, even though we didn't have enough. I love volunteering, because I am able to share my knowledge and skills to address health disparities in my community."

While earning her bachelor's degree in public health from UC Berkeley, Martinez Resendiz spent time volunteering in the Pediatrics Department at Kaiser Permanente Richmond Medical Center, connecting patients to resources in the community. That's where she learned about the RotaCare clinic.

Kaiser Permanente is a partner of RotaCare Bay Area and its 10 clinics. The Richmond clinic opened 6 years ago, "and as every week has passed since then we have indeed become the 'safety net below the safety net' for our patients in this area," said Amit Randhawa, clinic operations manager.

All of the patients who visit the clinic are uninsured, and many have not been to a doctor in years.

"The clinic wouldn't run without volunteers," said Martinez Resendiz, who has her sights set on becoming a nurse practitioner.

Curshanda Cusseaux Woods, Kaiser Permanente Northern California Community Relations manager, said Martinez Resendiz' volunteer efforts are the embodiment of "our mission to strengthen the communities we serve."

"It's amazing that so many of our employees and physicians go above and beyond their day-to-day jobs to give their time to serve our communities.," Cusseaux Woods said.

If not for the RotaCare clinic, many of its patients would likely end up in the Kaiser Permanente

Richmond Medical Center Emergency Department seeking care for non-emergent needs, a common problem nationwide that drives up health care costs.

“I think the clinic really helps decompress our emergency department, which is the only one in this area,” said [Lee Villanueva, MD](#), a Kaiser Permanente Richmond family medicine physician who serves on the clinic advisory council and works with Martinez Resendiz.

Villanueva said she is “inspired and blown away” by Martinez Resendiz’ volunteer efforts. “She really deserves to be recognized.”

At the clinic, Martinez Resendiz greets patients, takes their vital signs, and serves as an ad hoc Spanish-English interpreter. She often sees patients in the clinic she knows from her church, and from the Richmond community where she grew up.

“I was just thinking how my parents don’t have health insurance and how they rely on clinics like this,” she said. “So volunteering is in my heart, and it’s personal.”

*Those wishing to volunteer, whether they hold medical licenses or want to provide administrative assistance, are encouraged to send an email to [volunteer.richmond@rotacarebayarea.org](mailto:volunteer.richmond@rotacarebayarea.org) or call 510-871-4974. Learn about more volunteer opportunities throughout the region at [KPCares](#).*