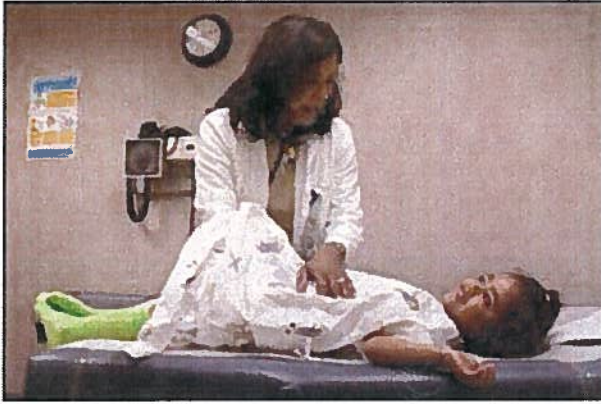


Health: Taking care is their business

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Dr. Olga Guijon, a pediatrician at The Children's Clinic Family Health Center at Cesar Chavez Elementary School, performs a physical. The area has a wide variety of health care providers and agencies.
(Kevin Chang / Press Telegram)

The Long Beach area is home to many top quality hospitals providing a wide range of health care services.

Long Beach's largest hospital, Long Beach Memorial Medical Center, celebrated its centennial this year.

The medical center first opened its doors in 1907 as Seaside Hospital. Over the last 100 years, it has grown from a converted 13-room Victorian home with just 18 beds to a 54-acre campus with 768 beds, 5,000 employees and 1,300 doctors, said Richard Damrel, Long Beach Memorial spokesman.

The hospital is largely known for its cardiovascular surgery center and cancer institute, he said.

Together with Miller Children's Hospital, it is the second largest nonprofit, community-based medical center west of the Mississippi, according to CEO Terry Belmont.

Miller Children's, located on the campus of Long Beach Memorial, is in the process of its own expansion.

By late 2008, the children's hospital will include a new 120,000-square-foot inpatient wing with 40 more beds and a pediatric surgery center.

St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach features private rooms for all of its acute care patients, said hospital spokeswoman Kathleen O'Guin.

The original building was called the Long Beach Sanitarium, before it was purchased by members of the Catholic Church in 1923.

The hospital took a major hit during the 1933 earthquake. All patients were safely evacuated, but the structure itself was demolished. In 1937, a 100-bed facility was rebuilt on the original site, and has since been expanded to contain 405 private rooms, O'Guin said.

After serving the community of East Long Beach for more than 70 years, Community Hospital of Long Beach was closed in September 2000, by former parent company Catholic Healthcare West.

But a group of doctors, volunteers, staff and concerned citizens quickly formed a grassroots campaign called "Save Our Neighborhood Hospital," and successfully reopened the hospital in June 2001.

Community Hospital celebrated its 83rd birthday in July.

Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center in Downey is another medical facility with a rich history.

The first buildings were founded in 1888 as a Los Angeles County "Poor Farm," where the poor could work in exchange for food and shelter, said hospital spokesman John McGuire.

As the workers began to age, doctors and nurses were brought in to care for them, he said.

The center made its official transition to rehabilitative care in the 1950s, after the mass polio epidemic.

It is also the site where the halo vest, still used as a brace to aid spinal and neck injuries, was first developed by Dr. Vernon L. Nickel in 1955.

Today the hospital is the largest free-standing medical rehabilitation facility in the L.A. area, McGuire said. The center sees about 200 inpatients a month and close to 53,000 outpatients each year.