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Senator Mark Hass Applauds New Wellness Center in Downtown Portland

2BWell Community Clinic emphasizes prevention and healthy eating and is part of a partnership with a longstanding acupuncture clinic in Lake Oswego

By: *Christen McCurdy*

July 19, 2012 -- For several years, Siamak Shirazi practiced acupuncture in Lake Oswego – mostly serving affluent clients whose insurance covered the cost of their care. A year ago, Shirazi started volunteering at Mercy & Wisdom Healing Center in downtown Portland, which provides complimentary care on a sliding scale to people who lack insurance or have difficulty paying for services.

He enjoyed working with the population so much that when Mercy & Wisdom decided to relocate to Southeast Portland (at S.E. 84th Avenue and Powell), Shirazi decided to move into the 86-year-old Wax Building and continue providing similar care.

He bought the building a year ago this month and has spent the first few months renovating the space, opening the 2BWell Downtown Community Health Clinic in April. Shirazi originally intended to open the clinic as a non-profit, similar to Mercy & Wisdom's business model, but instead has decided to follow what he called a "social enterprise" model, with his clinic in Lake Oswego – also called 2BWell – financing the downtown clinic.

"My vision is to be a resource for everybody, not just people who can afford it," said Shirazi who arrived in the U.S from Tehran in 1985 with \$500 and a suitcase. Knowing how challenging it can be to live healthfully on little money, he wants to give back as much as possible.

The new clinic employs two naturopathic physicians and another who's working toward a license, two acupuncturists, a dietitian and a physical therapist. The clinic also serves as a teaching site for the National College of Naturopathic Medicine and Western States Chiropractic College.

The WSCC clinic is on the second floor of the building and will soon relocate, and Shirazi is interviewing chiropractors to work at the clinic and fill that void. He also hopes to bring a nurse practitioner or medical doctor on board eventually to truly offer comprehensive treatment.

"Our naturopaths do a fantastic job, but sometimes it's less expensive to fill a prescription through a nurse practitioner or MD than through a naturopath," Shirazi said.

"We really are trying to provide comprehensive treatment for the people who we treat," said Stephanie Lamb, 2BWell's marketing and public relations coordinator, who also teaches a weekly yoga class at the clinic.

In addition to yoga classes, acupuncture treatments and office visits, the clinic offers health and wellness classes and workshops. One class next week will include a mile-long walk and a trip to the grocery store, where a dietitian will show people how to choose healthy food even when they have a limited budget. Shirazi is also offering a free homeopathic smoking cessation treatment as part of a research study.

The emphasis on prevention – and not just treating and maintaining chronic conditions once they flare up – was part of what piqued Senator Mark Hass' (D-Beaverton) interest. Now he's among 11 volunteer members on 2BWell's executive board.

"I literally have spent years trying to find help for people to stay a step ahead of diabetes," Hass said, especially lower-income populations. "If we can help people get in and have it all pencil out, I can't tell you how thrilled I am to be part of that."

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