

# Free mobile clinics restore dignity, heal through love



**Your Turn**  
Andrew Jacob  
Guest columnist

When Nydia Montijo, 63, first walked into a Mission of Mercy free mobile health-care clinic, she had nowhere else to turn.

Having just returned to Arizona from Puerto Rico, where she had been caring for her elderly parents, she found herself in an unfamiliar situation. She was unemployed but not yet eligible for AHCCCS. In Puerto Rico, she was being treated for high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Now, without any health coverage, she was running out of medication. She needed to see a physician to keep her health on track.

That's when she remembered Mission of Mercy, which she had learned about while working for Fresh Start Women's Center in Phoenix years prior to her move to Puerto Rico. During her six-month employment gap, Montijo was able to rely on Mission of Mercy to provide medications for her high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol.

"Mission of Mercy was my safety net at a time when I needed help," Montijo said. "As a professional in the health and human services field, I recognized that I was treated with dignity and respect and the quality of care that I received was on par with a private medical prac-



MISSION OF MERCY

tice. The generosity of their volunteer medical professionals ensures that members of our community don't have to fall through the cracks of a broken healthcare system."

Mission of Mercy provides "healing through love" with free primary health care and medications. Over the past two decades, Mission of Mercy has provided more than 226,000 pro bono patient visits and dispensed more than 350,000 free prescription medications to those — like Montijo — who find themselves in need of care.

"We serve anyone who needs primary-care services, regardless of age, status, background or ability to pay. This means no sliding scales or qualifying process," said Arizona Executive Director Paula Carvalho.

"We not only provide care and treatment for acute health concerns, we also provide holistic medical care and education for those dealing with chronic conditions like diabetes. Unlike traditional medical offices, we even give our patients medications that they otherwise could not afford. And we do so with

no charge whatsoever."

Arizona has one of the highest rates of uninsured in the nation. Mission of Mercy's health-care services keep the uninsured out of emergency rooms and prevent avoidable hospitalizations.

Mission of Mercy and its seven mobile health clinics throughout Maricopa County help uninsured and underinsured patients manage chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Mission of Mercy's work. A robust volunteer workforce of more than 250 medical, interpreting and data entry professionals contribute nearly \$1 million in volunteer service and 17,000 hours annually. This team provides nearly 15,000 patient visits each year.

"I receive zero monetary compensation, but I receive a great deal of compensation in terms of the good feeling that I get being there, the ability to come home feeling I've made a difference," said retired cardiologist Ira Ehrlich, a volunteer physician at Mission of Mercy's Mesa clinic.

Mission of Mercy is 100 percent privately funded, receiving no federal or state funding. For more information on how to support Mission of Mercy or how to receive services, visit [www.momaz.org](http://www.momaz.org).

*Andrew Jacob, M.D., J.D., is a member of Mission of Mercy's board of directors.*