

# Daily Herald

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## Expert tapped to reduce hospital visits by county's uninsured residents

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In 2003, Kane County's five hospitals provided \$42 million in care to uninsured, underinsured and undocumented residents – a cost that makes health care more expensive, officials said Tuesday.

In the tow years since, a Texas-based consultant has been researching the problem.

Now, Kane County hospitals and area clinics, county health officials, and the Illinois Hospital Association plan to act on that research – and cut costs to improve care, Deb McElroy of Kane Community Health Access Integrated Network said Tuesday.

The plan is to educate the uninsured and under insured and steer them to clinics like the Greater Elgin Family Care Center or KidCare in Kane County, which are subsidized by the federal government – not local health care bills.

But it's going to take more than brochures and advocates in each hospital to do the trick. It's going to take cultural understanding, says the woman

who led the research and will lead the outreach.

Sylvia Acevedo of Austin, Texas, and the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's 2004 Hispanic Businesswoman of the Year, heads a company that develops bilingual communication tools.

The majority of the people Acevedo interviewed during her research at Kane County hospitals were Latino. Their literacy skills varied and so did their understanding of a clinic.

"In their country of origin, they're not familiar with the concept of a clinic where you can go to one place and establish medical records," Acevedo said.

They also aren't familiar with big bills for ambulance service – and rely on taxi cabs instead, Acevedo said.

"One woman had her baby literally on the front lawn at (an Elgin hospital) because she thought it was much more affordable to take a cab than an ambulance," Acevedo said. "People also said bus service is

not as good in Carpentersville and the greater Elgin area, so people called taxis."

Acevedo's company specializes in preparing materials for agencies reaching out to non-English-speaking people.

So she'll now take her research and develop a communication tool to give to taxi drivers and beauty shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and bakeries. She plans to educated people, letting them know that local clinics are closer, cheaper, faster and as good as hospitals.

Her approach has gotten results.

In Austin, for example, Acevedo created a brochure no bigger than a passport for police officers to show Spanish-speaking residents during traffic stops. Officers point to pictures as well as explanations written in Spanish to explain the violation – the brochure led to a 20 percent reduction in the need for translators on the scene, she said.

Republican state Rep. Ruth Munson of Elgin heard of

Acevedo's work on the radio and thought Kane County health care providers could benefit from her skills.

"Every single hospital and clinic I called said, 'I'm in,'" Munson said.

Including Elgin's Provena St. Joseph Hospital.

"This is another way our community can celebrate its rich diversity," St. Joe's president and CEO Bill Brown said in a prepared statement. "It strengthens the collaboration between hospitals, local agencies and the government as we reach out to those in need."

The Kane County Health Department, Sherman Hospital as well as Aunt Martha's Youth Center, Greater Elgin Family Care Center and the Illinois Hospital Association also are footing the \$15,000 to \$30,000 bill to cover Acevedo's research and the communication tool she develops.

The theme of Acevedo's tool will be: "Bueno, barrato rápido," or "Good, affordable and fast."