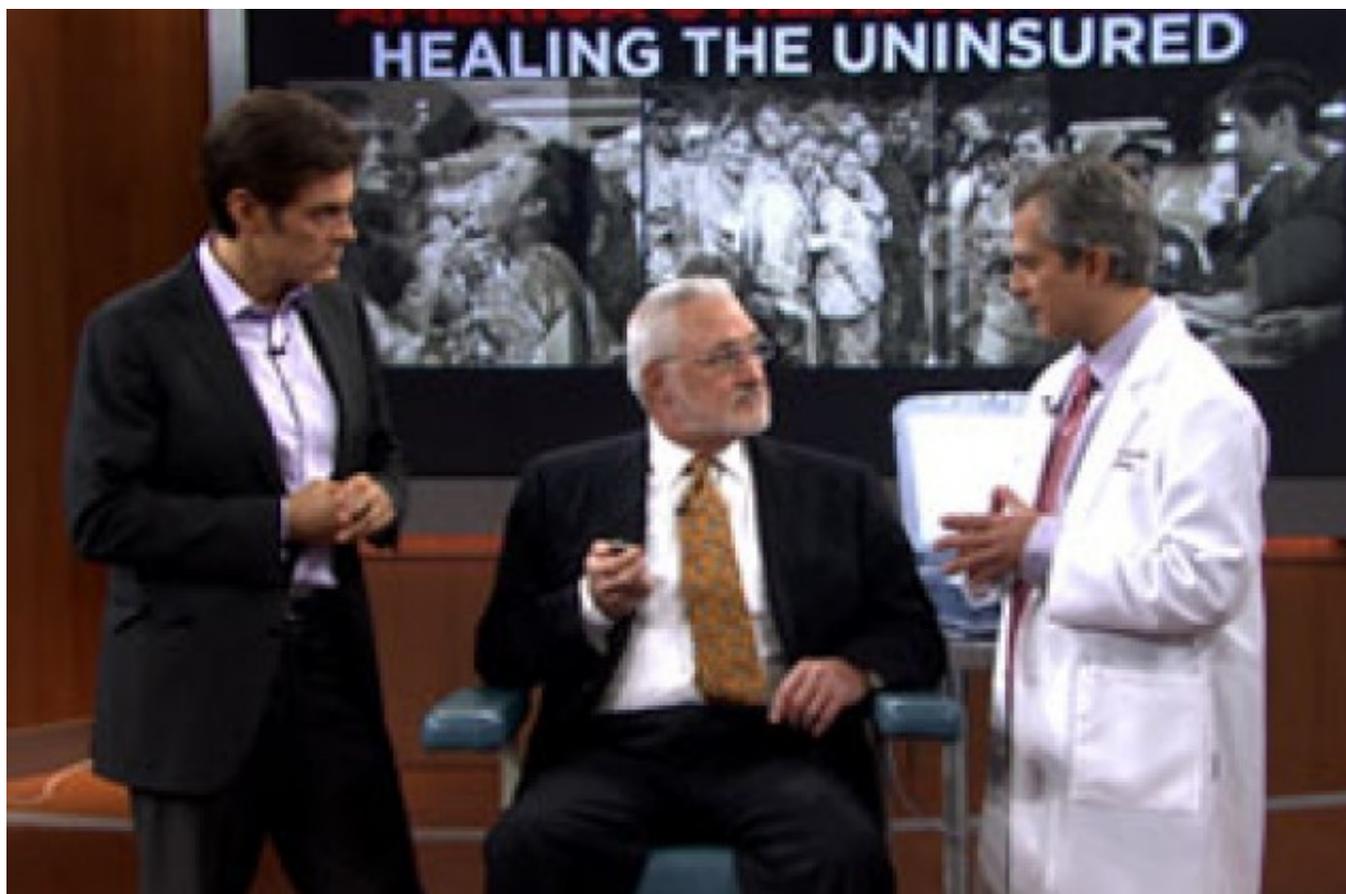


## The CareNow Free Clinic Saved My Life

Vern Bowman attended the CareNow free clinic in Los Angeles. After working for 41 years, he lost his job two years ago, as well as his access to health insurance. He went to the free clinic to see a dentist, but while under the care of volunteer physicians, learned he had a much more serious problem with this AICD heart defibrillator. Here is his story.



Life without insurance had left me feeling empty. The inability to not be able to go and get health care when it is necessary is to deprive yourself of what is due and expected. When asked or told by others that I should get a new medical issue taken care of right away, I just answered them by agreeing and thinking to myself, “I wish it was possible.” Without insurance or income, this isn't possible and just becomes another wish-list item. My medical situations with coronary artery disease, AICD, high blood pressure, hypothyroidism, and high cholesterol are foremost my biggest health worries.

The times that I have postponed my health care has affected my mental state, leaving me frustrated, irritated, with a lack of self-respect. I kept my thoughts bottled up inside, knowing that everyone has their problems and nothing changes.

On the morning of October 17, 2011, while watching the news, I saw a report that hundreds of people had been lining up at the Los Angeles Sports Arena to pick up wristbands for a free health-care clinic. The wristbands were going to be distributed on a first come, first serve basis. There would be volunteer doctors and nurses available to provide medical, dental, and vision services to uninsured and underinsured people without charge. Hearing this news got me excited and I did not want to miss this opportunity. I had a cracked tooth and needed my vision checked. So, I headed out to join the now growing line of people. I kept hoping every minute that my place in line was the right place so I would be eligible to get one of the 5000 wristbands to be handed out.

Initially, having to attend the free clinic was tense, uncomfortable, and I felt ashamed of myself. I worked 41 years and always had health insurance. Now, after being laid off and unemployed, here's my fate.

I did recognize that I was not alone in the situation, and, like myself, many others were unemployed. Many of those employed had no insurance available or their wages were so low they could not afford it medical services.

I was impressed with the health care provided considering the amount of people and ailments, and factoring in the time element. I felt very confident with the health-care professionals. They were courteous, caring, understanding, and able to provide the services that needed to be rendered. The CareNow providers showed extraordinary professionalism under some of the toughest circumstances and will grow only better over time.

My personal experience at the clinic on October 20, 2011 was both incredible and miraculous. During the screening process, I requested to have dental and vision work. I also provided my medical history, which included that I had heart disease and an AICD (Automatic Implanted Cardioverter Defibrillator). I was asked when was my last cardiologist visit was; it was in April 2010. The volunteer who was assisting me recommended that I stop by the medical area and see one of the doctors during my visit to the clinic, which I agreed to.

After completing the screening process, I continued on my way to the dental area to get my tooth filled, and checked the vision area, which was packed with people. I decided that I'd return later and go to the medical area to be checked by the doctor on duty. After a general exam by the doctor, I was asked if I would like to visit with the cardiologist. I met the cardiologist on duty and explained my medical history and when my last cardiovascular examination was performed. He recommended that I get checked soon due to the battery life of my AICD (defibrillator), as well as further testing. If I felt that I needed help, he explained that the LAC/USC Medical Center would be available to me.

After this examination, I moved to the vision area to have my eyes checked. It was very busy, but I knew that I had to get this done. It finally was my turn; I went about getting the various eye exams. I reached about half of the tests when it was decided that several of us needed to return the next day to finish the last portion of our eye care. All of us would receive new wristbands for our return visit to the vision area.

The next day, October 21, 2011, as I waited for the next portion of my vision care, is when my story really started. Off to the left of us was Dr. Oz. He introduced himself to all of us and began asking questions to the people in our line, such as what sort of health care we had come for and received so far. When he asked me, I told him about the dental, vision and medical care, including my visit to cardiology. Dr. Oz told me he is a cardiac surgeon. He asked if I'd mind answering a few questions regarding my heart. I answered a few questions about the dates when my last cardiac-arrhythmia and echocardiogram were done.

He asked me if I knew about my present heart condition and how much battery life was left in my defibrillator, and I really couldn't answer either with certainty.

I knew my defibrillator wasn't beeping, so that was a good thing – or so I thought! It wasn't the reaction Dr. Oz wanted to hear. He explained that the beeping is the last thing I should be hearing, and I should be advised prior to that that the battery life is reaching its end.

From that point forward, he made arrangements for me to get tested by a cardiologist as soon as possible. He asked me to return later after I finished with my vision care. We met later and Dr. Oz had another cardiologist, Dr. Ariani, monitor readings of my heart at the free clinic. Both doctors advised me that my heart function appears strong.

Dr. Oz and Dr. Ariani told me at that they would discuss further testing, but that I must do something about the current state of my defibrillator. I felt like a ticking time bomb.

Today, I realize that I must be my own advocate regarding my health care and accept nothing less from any health-care professional.

**Note:** *At the end of the clinic, Vern would receive the donation of a new defibrillator, worth \$50,000, as well as the volunteer services and care of Dr. Ariani.*