

# YOUR MONEY

## Specialist would love some help

By Amritha Alladi

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The doctor is in, and he's staying. But he could certainly use an extra hand.

As the only endocrinologist on the island, Dr. Joel Marc Rubio of Health Partners LLC said he understands the need for special care on Guam, and that's why he continues to practice here. But he admits, he wouldn't mind some extra help by way of other endocrinologists moving to the island as well.

"My decision to stay is, ... I'm very much invested in the community. I knew this community, I grew up here," Rubio said. "I wish other people would see it that way."

Yet globally, endocrinology is an underserved field, he added.

In school, Rubio's favorite subject was physiology, the normal working of the human body.

"The basis for endocrinology is that something disrupts the normal working of the body," he said.

Rubio received his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of the Philippines in 1981. He did his doctoral work from 1981 to 1985 at University of the East in Manila.

After completing his residency at Cornell University in 1991, he pursued a fellowship in endocrinology at State University of New York in Stony Brook. Rubio then worked at the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center in New York.

In 1998, he was based in the Philippines as the endocrinology section chief at De La Salle University in Manila. Every three months, he would visit Guam, Rubio said.

He finally decided to settle on Guam in 2001 when he joined what was then PacifiCare, eventually becoming the department head for internal medicine.

"I saw that the service was definitely needed and definitely welcome," Rubio said.

Then he and Dr. Annette David, an internist, started Health Partners at the ITC building about five years ago, he said.

Rubio said about half of his patients come in for diabetes-related problems. This comes as no shock to him because Guam has the highest rate of diabetes in the nation.



Jacqueline Hernandez/Pacific Sunday News/jhernande7@guampdn.com

**Endocrinologist:** Dr. Joel Marc Rubio, M.D., of Health Partners LLC is photographed in front of his clinic in the ITC Building on Nov. 10.

### AT A GLANCE

- ▲ **Name:** Dr. Joel Marc C. Rubio
- ▲ **Village:** Dededo
- ▲ **Specialty:** Endocrinology
- ▲ **Education:** Bachelor's in Psychology from the University of the Philippines in 1981; Doctor of Medicine from the University of the East in Manila in 1985; residency completed at Cornell University in 1991; endocrinology fellowship completed

Diabetes has been ranked the seventh leading cause of death on Guam, according to the Guam Diabetes and Prevention Control Program. A 2007 survey by the Guam Diabetes Association revealed about 9 percent of Guam residents are diabetic, compared to 8 percent across the country.

That may be one reason patients have to wait up to three and a half weeks to get an initial appointment, although follow-ups are scheduled within one week.

There's just no one else on the island to treat them, Rubio said. However, he noted that from 2004 to 2007, there was one pediatric en-

at State University of New York in Stony Brook

▲ **Positions held:** Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center in New York, section chief at De La Salle University in Manila, Internal Medicine Department head at PacifiCare. Currently a partner at Health Partners LLC

▲ **Doctor's orders to current medical students:** "Come home already."

docrinologist on the island.

"It's unfortunate that she moved," Rubio said. "Patients could see who they really wanted to see."

• He currently sees 15 to 20 patients a day, and he works three full days and three half days a week. Rubio said he tries not to pack appointments in so he can give patients the attention they deserve.

It used to be that people could just call for appointments, but now he primarily sees patients through referrals from other physicians, he said.

Still, Rubio said he sees the need for someone else to step in.

"I don't see anyone," he said.

"What would be an ideal environment is quite underserved."

Rubio said Guam loses medical students to established medical centers and universities in the mainland, which have more sophisticated equipment to aid in treatment. The techniques done in the mainland may not be done here for a few years, he said.

Guam does have certain draws that make medical practice here attractive — at least to some physicians.

While many budding doctors feel they can make bigger bucks in the United States, Rubio said, doctors can create their own salaries by settling down on Guam. There is already a clear demand for specialized care.

"Come home already," Rubio said. He added that Guam Memorial Hospital's pending full accreditation will influence the prospect of attracting physicians to Guam.

"I've been gearing young people to train, (undergraduates whom) I feel I've influenced here possibly," Rubio said. "I'm trying to get them to go down this path."