

9/11 health forum

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By Julie Shapiro

Celia Correa, 58, has lung disease and a host of other medical problems that she believes are connected to her exposure to the World Trade Center dust after 9/11.

She and other activists are holding a forum about 9/11 health Sunday afternoon. Residents, workers and students will speak about their continuing health problems following 9/11. Doctors will talk about the 9/11-related illnesses they have seen and will tell people where they can go for treatment.

“More and more of us are developing more and more illnesses and conditions, but they’re not being linked to 9/11,” Correa said. “These medical problems take a toll on your body slowly, and finally it erupts.”

One goal of Sunday’s event is to spread the word about the W.T.C. Environmental Health Center, which offers free treatment to anyone with 9/11-related health problems. Staff from the center will register attendees for intake exams at Bellevue Hospital, Gouverneur Healthcare Services on the Lower East Side and Elmhurst Hospital in Queens.

Laine Romero-Alston, director of research and policy for the Urban Justice Center, one of the organizers, sees the event as an opportunity to spread the word about the free healthcare.

“There’s a serious health crisis related to 9/11,” Romero-Alston said. “Doctors don’t know what’s going on. What was initially all respiratory, is not all respiratory.”

She said doctors are now seeing increasing numbers of cancer cases and blood diseases in those exposed to 9/11 contaminants, along with more complaints about skin, digestive and gynecological problems.

Correa said she has experienced a progression of symptoms. She worked as an administrative assistant at 88 Pine St. from October 2001 until July 2004. She helped clean the office and worked at a desk directly beneath an air vent. The dust from 9/11 was literally part of the air she breathed, she said.

Correa developed lung disease, chronic asthma and bronchitis, respiratory problems that some doctors have linked to 9/11. But she also noticed a number of other health problems, which she didn’t initially connect to her exposure. She had acid reflux, vertigo, muscle aches, hemorrhaging and a rash that doctors couldn’t diagnose. No longer able to work, Correa was left without health insurance and had to declare bankruptcy.

Now, Correa receives all her healthcare and medication through the W.T.C. Environmental Health Center. She is also a member of Beyond Ground Zero, an activist organization that is cosponsoring Sunday's panel.

Jeffery Hon, the city's 9/11 health coordinator will attend the forum. Dr. Joan Reibman, a 9/11 health expert, will speak, along with representatives of several local elected officials.

The activists will also call on the federal government to provide funding for 9/11-related healthcare and research.

"They're not doing anything about it," Correa said. "We don't understand why the government doesn't want to acknowledge us." Correa wants a guarantee of lifelong workers compensation and subsidized healthcare.

"We don't know, ultimately, what the full health fallout is, or what it will be in five, 10 years," Romero-Alston added. "There needs to be long-term federal response for all those affected."

The 9/11 health forum will be held at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, at 199 Chambers St., on Sun., April 13 at 2 p.m.