

SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

Mastering the lesson of giving back

ON A CHILLY FALL EVENING IN SEATTLE'S WALLINGFORD NEIGHBORHOOD, pedestrians scurry along 45th Street as darkness gathers, coats zipped tightly against the early-November chill. There's a suggestion of rain in the air, hinting at the soggy gloom that will soon cast its customary shroud over the city for the next four months. It's a good night to be someplace warm and welcoming.

Some of those on the street tonight, especially those who are homeless young adults, can only dream of such a place. But these young people can find at least a momentary haven, one where they can get basic health care and emotional support.

NeighborCare Health's 45th Street Clinic, a primary-care clinic that also encompasses a homeless-youth medical and dental clinic, is just that place. And, on four Thursday evenings every academic quarter, students and faculty from the School of Dentistry volunteer their services.

Upstairs at the clinic this evening, nine students are tending to patients. Two dentists always supervise, one from the School of Dentistry faculty and one from NeighborCare staff. Tonight it's Dr. Douglas Verhoef, the School's director of pre-doctoral

Restorative clinics, and Dr. Glenn Govin, who wears two hats: NeighborCare's and the School's, as director of the Dental Education in Care of Persons with Disabilities program.

The School's outreach at the clinic was launched in 2005 by Dr. Donald Chi, then a UW dental student and now a pediatric dentist and newly appointed UW faculty member. Along with four operatories, NeighborCare provides administrative help with patient charts.

Students, however, do the rest, including raising funds for clinical operations and supplies. The Class of 2010's Winter Gala early in 2009 raised \$6,138 for the outreach, and students stretched those dollars with a discount from Burkhart Dental Supply.

The patients are mostly 18 to 21 years old – not that much younger than the dental students, so there's an easy rapport among them. Student director Matthew Epstein ('10) notes that "homeless" patients don't always live on the streets or at shelters. Some come from abusive homes and are living with friends or drifting from one temporary spot to another.

Regardless, says student director Diana Cortes ('11), "It's pretty impressive that patients even make an effort to come here."

Luke Adams ('11) and Carrie Huttenlocher ('10) tend to a patient at the 45th Street Clinic.



“You see kids who look like they’ve had dental care all their lives, along with kids with really serious problems (sometimes drug-related),” says Alana Hagney (’10).

Some just need cleaning and prophylactic care. One 21-year-old patient tonight is making her first-ever visit to a dentist. Remarkably enough, in a testament to good genes, good diet, good brushing and good luck, she needs only a cleaning. Some patients, however, need serial extractions or extensive restorative care.

Says Dr. Govin: “You see a lot of people who you hate to let go back on the street – homeless teens in really dire straits. Many of them have ‘aged out’ of foster care.”

Dentistry students relish the experience not only for the chance to do some good, but because they have a little more latitude in delivering care than they do at school. However, the cases that are too complex are referred elsewhere; serial extractions, for example, often go to Harborview Medical Center.

Says Graham Meng (’11), who is making his fourth volunteer trip to the clinic: “One of the fourth-years told me it was a good experience. I see this as a good way to give back a little bit.”



The 45th Street Clinic is one of the School’s most popular student volunteer outreaches, but it is hardly the only one. Students give their time, services, money and even sweat to help extend oral health care to those sorely in need of it.

Much of the outreach activity is coordinated through the School’s Office of Educational Partnerships and Diversity (OEPD), which is directed by Dr. Bea Gandara of Oral Medicine and administered by Memory Brock. Additionally, OEPD conducts recruitment activities, with students volunteering in

wax-up workshops for pre-dental students at the UW, Dental Camp experiences for middle- and high-school students and career fairs at local high schools, colleges and universities.

Students also participate in the School’s Oral Health Collaborative, directed by Associate Professor Norma Wells of Dental Public Health Sciences, which conducts oral health screenings (sometimes in conjunction with on-site volunteer treatment providers) and provides referrals. Other faculty members also lend their time and support to the student volunteers.

Here’s a brief look at the ways in which UW Dentistry students reach out to the community.

Rock ‘n’ Roll Seattle Marathon Fund-Raiser for Access to Care

STUDENT LEADER: GRAHAM MENG (’11)

Last year’s event was the inaugural race in Seattle. A team of 22 from the School of Dentistry solicited pledges and raised more than \$3,000 for the School’s Access to Care Fund, which supports student volunteer outreach activities. This year, team organizers are trying to find a sponsor to help defray team entry fees, and they’d love to have more feet on the ground.

“I would love it if we had 50 or more runners,” says Dr. Gandara, who ran last year and plans to do so this year as well. All dental students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and family are welcome to join the School’s team. The 2010 event, which includes a full marathon and half-marathon, will be held on June 26. (Early word is that Dean Somerman, an avid runner, will join the team.) For more information, contact gmeng@u.washington.edu.



Rainier Vista Boys and Girls Clubs

**STUDENT LEADERS: DAN SEETIN ('11) AND
WHITNEY BATOR ('12)**

This outreach is a collaboration with Washington Oral Health Foundation (WOHF), the philanthropic arm of the Washington State Dental Association. Last summer, WOHF opened a one-chair clinic and oral health education center at Rainier Vista Boys and Girls Club in Seattle. Since then, UW students have given classes at the Rainier Vista club and other Boys and Girls clubs and talked with youngsters about careers in dentistry, mouth-guard use during sports, and the effect of smoking and drugs on oral health. The outreach organizers hope to have dental students deliver care at the clinic, partnering with volunteer community dentists.

Students in the Community

**STUDENT LEADERS: SEUNG YU ('10),
LINDSAY BOOTH ('13)**

Students in the Community (SITC) is a UW multi-disciplinary volunteer health professional organization. Dentistry students have been giving their support as oral health advisers to residents at Aloha Inn, a transitional housing facility for homeless people. A new project is being organized at Casa Latina, a day labor center, where students will provide oral health education in Spanish. Bri Butler ('12) is currently leading lunchtime Spanish conversation classes at the school that provide students opportunities to practice dental interactions with patients. SITC also fosters collaboration among UW medical and dental students.

Husky Smiles

STUDENT LEADER: DAVID TA ('11)

Husky Smiles has been completely operated by UW dental students since the program was initiated by Jane Prebilsky ('02), now Dr. Jane Gillette. Students visit approximately four sites each year – schools, community centers, and nonprofit social service agencies – to teach about oral health and provide screenings and fluoride varnish applications for children who lack regular access to dental care. Last year, Dentistry students also collaborated with UW School of Nursing students, teaching them how to deliver oral hygiene training for their outreach efforts.

Summer Medical and Dental Education Program

**CO-DIRECTORS: DR. BEA GANDARA AND
DR. DAVID ACOSTA, ASSOCIATE DEAN
OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS,
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

This program for college freshmen and sophomores was begun in 1988 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as the Minority Medical Education Program. It was originally designed to boost the number of highly qualified medical school applicants from minority groups, through a six-week medical school preparatory program. Today, under a new name, the program now includes economically disadvantaged students from rural medically underserved areas. It also has expanded to include pre-dental students, and receives direction and technical assistance from the Association of American Medical Colleges and the American Dental Education Association. Community and faculty physicians and dentists serve as preceptors, while medical and dental students volunteer in workshops as teachers and mentors. Students also join panel discussions on preparing more effective applications for medical and dental school.

Latina Women's Health Fair

**STUDENT LEADERS: SHEILA FARAHANI ('10),
DIANA CORTES ('11)**

While the outreach target population is primarily Hispanic, this multidisciplinary health fair serves hundreds of women and their families and is open to all. Last year, nine dental students and six faculty members examined patients at the fair, applied fluoride varnishes and provided referrals to community dental services. Students and faculty will make a return visit at this year's fair in May.

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“The message is clear,” says Dr. Gandara. “Our students want to be engaged in the community. They want to step up to participate in, and even start, programs that aim to improve oral health for everyone. These students are educators, leaders and compassionate care providers who have mastered the lesson of giving back to the community.” ■



Flanked by Dr. Bea Gandara of Oral Medicine and Dr. Sami Dogan of Restorative Dentistry, members of the School's 2009 Rock 'n' Roll Marathon team are clearly in elevated spirits.