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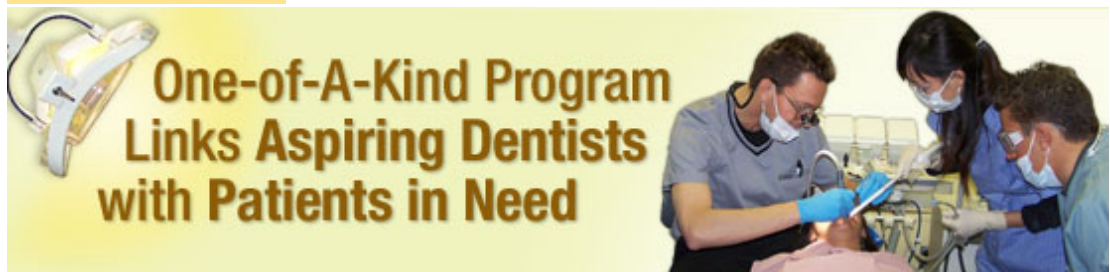
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By Ioana Patrigenaru | February 27, 2006

It's already 4:30 p.m. on a Wednesday, but half a dozen UCSD students are getting ready to be on their feet for another five hours, helping dentists treat patients at a Pacific Beach church. Many of the patients work but don't have health insurance; free clinics are the only places where they can get treatment. All the students want to become dentists; the clinics are the best places to start learning their future trade, they said.

The students are working at one of three sites in the UCSD Student-Run Free Dental Clinic Project. Many carry a full load of classes and hold down jobs. They said their goal is to help those who can't afford dental insurance while getting experience, which, hopefully, will help them get into dental school.

### For more information:

Call Irvin Silverstein's office at  
**(619) 466-6666**

or visit the UCSD Student-Run Free  
 Dental Project Web site at:

<http://www-ac.s.ucsd.edu/~ucsd/fdc>

"Health care is a right, not a privilege," said Samson Yang, a fourth-year human biology major who has been volunteering at the clinics for almost two years. "It should be offered to everybody."

The free dental clinics earned a Golden Apple Award from the American Dental Association in 2005. The ADA looks for strong involvement from volunteers, good participation and objective measures to quantify results, said ADA Manager Ron Polaniecki.

The clinics get patients out of pain, said Irvin Silverstein, director and advisor to the UCSD Student-Run Free Dental Clinic Project and to the UCSD Pre-Dental Society. They also allow some patients to get a job, by helping them improve their appearance, he added. He has estimated the clinics provided \$400,000 worth of care between 2001 and 2004. In all, 57 dentists and 175 students take turns volunteering at clinics in Pacific Beach, downtown and southeast San Diego. A dozen more dentists are getting ready to join, Silverstein said. He puts in 40 hours a week to run the program — without pay. He also has a private practice in La Mesa and is a voluntary assistant clinical professor with UCSD's medical school.

The project is unique nationwide in that it links pre-dental students with doctors, said Susan Lovelace, executive director of the San Diego County Dental Association, which provides financial support for the program and promotes it.

### AN EVENING AT A CLINIC



Around 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Yang headed out to the mess hall at Pacific Beach United Methodist Church where a mix of the poor and the homeless stood in



Irvin Silverstein, director and advisor to the UCSD Student-Run Free Dental Clinic Project and to the UCSD Pre-Dental Society with student director Brock Lorenz.

line for a meal. On their way to get food, many stopped to seek care from the medical and dental clinics available that night. Yang's job was to triage patients — a sometimes thankless task. The dental clinic is booked, so he had to turn down several potential patients. He told them to keep coming back until they got a spot. The clinic would start seeing new patients in a month or so, he added. Yang did make room for two emergencies and verified that patients with appointments showed up.

Finally, around 6 p.m., the line tapered off and Yang headed back to the basement, where he started taking X-rays.

By then, dentist Craig Brandon already had arrived and had gone to work on the night's first patient, Wendy Lloyd, a volunteer at the church. Lloyd stays at home to take care of her son, who is disabled. He gets social security, but she doesn't have any benefits. She had already received fillings at the free clinic and was getting more Wednesday.

"This is just really, really a blessing," she said of the program.

She was due to come back for two more fillings and a crown.

While he worked on Lloyd, Brandon explained every step of the process to three students who had gathered around him. They helped suction and rinse.

Meanwhile, Jennifer Aldawoodi, a third-year math and economics major, sterilized instruments. She started volunteering at the clinics after her freshman year. She has wanted to be a dentist since she went to a dentist office during a career day event in eighth grade, she explained. She always liked to do intricate work with her hands, she added, and dentistry seemed like a good and fun career. She didn't realize she also would be helping people — until she started volunteering at the free dental clinics, she said. She particularly remembers a 40-year-old woman who was very afraid when she came in for a simple procedure. The other volunteers didn't seem to notice her fear. So Aldawoodi held her hand and talked her through the procedure, explaining every step. She plans to apply for dental school this year.

The clinics give students a leg up when they apply — a very competitive process, Silverstein said. Last year, UCSD students captured 79 dental school spots out of about 4000 nationwide.

"That's a tremendous, tremendous number," Silverstein said.

## HISTORY AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The first free dental clinic opened in Pacific Beach in January 1999. It wouldn't have been possible without donations from the Eugene J. Mindlin Foundation and UCSD's own Student-Run Free Clinics Program. As more volunteers started to take part, the program expanded to offer fillings, root canals and dentures, in addition to X-rays and extractions. A mobile clinic opened in August 2001 was closed down because of repeated vandalism, then reopened in February 2002 to serve southeast San Diego. A third clinic opened in April 2002 in downtown San Diego. Volunteer students now come from UCSD, San Diego State University, the University of San Diego and community colleges.

Each of the three clinics treats six to 10 patients on a given night. All patients sign a consent form stating they understand the clinics are a teaching environment, said Brian Kirkwood, one of the clinic managers.

The downtown and southeast San Diego sites are open twice a week. Pacific Beach is due to expand from one to two days a



is due to expand from one to two days a week in April. That same month, Silverstein and student director Brock Lorenz said they hope to launch an outreach program for youth. High school students would be paired with college students, who would act as mentors and tutors. Meanwhile, a pediatric dental clinic is set to open in March at the southeast San Diego site. Some students in the program, including Yang, already visit elementary schools to teach children how to take good care of their teeth. Some students also take part in outreach trips with the Thousand Smiles Foundation, which treats cleft palates for free in Mexico and Costa Rica.



Estella Kim, a fourth-year student, organizes burs, which are drilling or cutting bits used in dentistry.

As always, the free dental clinics program is looking for funds. Silverstein said he would like to hire a full-time administrator. That would allow the clinics to treat even more patients and teach more students.

"The need for care is infinite," he said.

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