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EYE on UCSD: UCSD Pre-Dental Society

Written by ArchiveAdmin

UCSD may not have a dental school for its aspiring dentists, but students like Revelle College sophomore John Chan still make the most of what it does offer.



Greg Dale/Guardian

Aspiring dentists like John Muir College senior Samson Yang (center) and Revelle College sophomore John Chan (right) have the opportunity to work with dentists like Dr. Craig Kubina (left) and get hands-on experience with dental procedures.

As a member of the Pre-Dental Society, Chan spent his Tuesday evening in a church basement in scrubs, scrambling around to get gauze and forceps for the dentist, Dr. Craig Kubina. Today Kubina is helping a scruffy man who needs to get two front teeth extracted. Although it is his first time volunteering at the clinic, Chan looks on and even helps Kubina pull out the patient's teeth. To stop the bleeding, Kubina shows Chan how to put pressure on the patient's gums with cotton.

Seven patients and five hours later, student volunteers from the Pre-Dental Society finish up their shift at the Free Clinic Project in Pacific Beach.

This weekly free clinic for those who cannot afford dental care is part of the outreach effort of the Pre-Dental Society.

According to the project's advisor and director Dr. Irvin Silverstein, there are plans to open two clinics. The two different locations — one in downtown San Diego and the other at Baker Elementary School — will offer the same services.

Being a clinic volunteer is no easy task. According to Silverstein, students who volunteer at the clinic must have all necessary immunizations, an X-ray certification, safety and CPR training, as well as certification from UCSD to volunteer. While there are over 100 members in the Pre-Dental Society, only 30 to 40 are active in volunteering at the clinic locations.

"Some students give up 20 to 40 hours a week to do this. They could be out partying but they are here instead," Silverstein said.

John Muir College senior Samson Yang is praised by his colleagues for being a faithful member. He had his humble beginnings just printing out fliers for the Pre-Dental Society and posting them around campus. After a year and a half of involvement, he is now the Pacific Beach clinic manager, the second-highest position a student can hold. In a single week, he commits 20 to 30 hours to the Pre-Dental Society.

"The time I spend on it is worth it because the skills I learned here are things I can't get in textbooks," Yang said. "It also teaches students to be involved in outreach at an early age."

For Yang, Tuesdays are the most demanding. After his morning

classes, Yang works at the clinic from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. After work, the clinic requires him to arrive at the Pacific Beach United Methodist Church at 5 p.m. to check in 50 to 60 patients who have made appointments, a process that takes an hour and a half. Once the licensed dentists arrive, the procedures and clean-up last until 10:30 p.m.

This routine is not unusual for other student volunteers. Many hold outside jobs but still manage to offer their time and efforts.

“I feel exhausted when I get home but I feel like I made a difference in other people’s lives,” Yang said. “I’m happy that I can help other people out.”


One unique aspect of working at the clinic is the opportunity to form relationships with patients. According to student volunteer Maria Buzzell, an alumna of Rensselaer Polytechnic University, patients can form relationships with the staff because they will return to the clinic for up to seven months. Relationship-building is crucial, especially in making the patients feel at ease as they get dental work.

The Free Clinic Project also helps change lives. Yang told the story of an alcoholic who had recently found a job, but had cavities in his front teeth. The Free Clinic Project was able to help the patient fix his teeth and give him a sense of professionalism and confidence.

“We’re more than dentistry,” Yang said. “We help people get back on their feet and give them their lives back again.”

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