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UCSD Students Volunteer Their Time for Pacific Partnership

By Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Patrick M. Kearney, USS Peleliu Public Affairs

Posted: 07/12/2007

USS PELELIU, Philippine Sea – Three college students from the University of California at San Diego's (UCSD) Pre-Dental Society volunteered their summer vacation to embark aboard USS Peleliu (LHA 5) as part of the dental team in support of Pacific Partnership.

Kennie Kwon, a graduate of UCSD who will be attending Boston University in August, Diana Lin, a fifth-year undergraduate student at UCSD and Joanne Nguyen, a recent graduate of UCSD's undergraduate program recently completed the Philippine portion of the four-month humanitarian assistance mission.

During their time in the Philippines, they took part in several Medical/Dental Civic Action Programs (MED/DENCAP) working as dental assistants.

"Working out there in the field was something I've never experienced before," said Kwon. "It's just amazing. You hear about people working out of a tent, but you never think you will be doing it."

Through their volunteer work with San Diego-area free clinics, the students prepared themselves for the type of work they would encounter while in the Philippines. The free clinic program is the first of its kind for undergraduate members of UCSD's Pre-Dental Society.

"The dental program in America is so much more different than it is in the Philippines. Participating in Pacific Partnership has been a real eye-opener," said Nguyen.

Through the work that they've been doing during Pacific Partnership, the students say they have learned a lot of different techniques from working with the Philippine and non-government organization (NGOs) dental professionals.

"Working with the people here has taught us to take the techniques we have learned and integrate it with our own," said Lin "Just being exposed to it all will help me to become a better dentist."

Another aspect the students said they learned is how health and dental care varies from country to country.

"I volunteered to come out here because I wanted something to motivate me to bring hope to people," said Nguyen, "This has been a very spiritual experience for me by making me see things I have never seen before."

Now that the students have completed the project in the Philippines, they will be returning this month to the States in time for their next semester of classes. The Pre-Dental Society plans to send three more volunteers to the ship that will finish out the remainder of Pacific Partnership.

"I feel honored to have been able to be here and to have had this experience," Lin said, "I learned so much in my time here."

The four-month Pacific Partnership humanitarian assistance mission brings to the region general and ophthalmology surgery, basic medical evaluation and treatment, preventive medicine treatment, dental screenings and treatment, optometry screenings, eyewear distribution, public health training and veterinary services as requested by the host nations.

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