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Volunteers sought for USNS Mercy

Dentists, others recruited for humanitarian mission

By Judy Jakush

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San Diego—The University of California San Diego, one of the major civilian partners for the Navy's USNS Mercy May-September Pacific Partnership 2008, is recruiting volunteers for this mission.

"We will be able to bring on volunteers in the pharmaceutical, dental, medical and surgical professions," said Dr. Irvin Silverstein, UCSD dental director/advisor. "Residents, students and preprofessional students from each of these fields are also welcome. We will be able to take volunteers from other schools and the private sector. Volunteers need to cover the cost of airfare to and from the ship's location. All costs are covered once each volunteer meets the ship."

This ship is a floating hospital with pharmacy, dental, veterinary and other medically related departments. Civilian students and health care professionals—volunteering through nongovernmental organizations like the UCSD Pre-Dental Society—work in conjunction with Navy physicians, surgeons, dentists and pharmacists to provide health care for the underserved in foreign countries. This mission will visit several countries in the Southeast Asia/Pacific area including Vietnam, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, the Federated States of Micronesia and Papua New Guinea.

Patients will be brought aboard the ship for surgical procedures and teams will be sent ashore to provide surgical screenings, immunizations, optometry, pharmaceutical and dental services.

"These teams will have the opportunity to work together with their counterparts in the host nations. This will be a time in which relationships can be formed between host countries and the U.S. teams. Hopefully, these dialogues will continue in the future," said Dr. Silverstein, who advises the UCSD Pre-Dental Society and Student-Run Free Dental clinics. "Not only is the Mercy an opportunity for the different professions within health care to work together, but professionals from all around the world will be joining together to provide services for those in need in the host countries."

The Navy expects to partner with countries including (but not limited to) Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, India, Chile and Portugal for volunteers to work side by side with American doctors. The U.S. Public Health Service will also be sending volunteers.

The Navy will be helping rebuild infrastructure in these countries such as fixing schools, hospitals and other facilities for which the host nation requests help, he said. There will be an opportunity to teach various health-related activities to host nation professional staff and civilians. Civilian volunteers will be allowed to assist the Navy with these projects.

Dr. Silverstein expressed his thanks for a donation of four CEREC machines from

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Sirona for use during the mission. "Using CEREC for restorations will be a first for this type of mission," he said.

Spaces are limited for these opportunities. For more information, please contact Dr. Silverstein at dsilverstein22@cox.net and let him know your interest and your background as soon as possible.

To learn about more international volunteer opportunities, please contact the ADA's Center for International Development and Affairs, 1-312-440-2727 or e-mail international@ada.org.

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