

Predental students get involved early in service



The predental students at the San Diego State University (SDSU) have formed a Chapter of the Flying Samaritans, and a group of them travels to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, on the border with California, USA.



The Flying Samaritans were formed back in 1961, as a non-profit organization dedicated to providing free healthcare for underserved populations in Baja California, Mexico. The organization consists of multiple chapters, each with up to eight different branches, and each operates a medical clinic in Baja, and most with a dental clinic. Volunteer students, doctors, nurses, pilots, and other health professionals travel with their Flying Samaritans branch to their respective clinic locations and run anywhere from 1-day to weekend long clinics on a monthly basis. Now with more than 1500 members, the Flying Samaritans mission has spread broadly across California, Arizona, and Baja California. Each branch operates slightly differently; however, all strive to attain the same goal of improving healthcare outcomes for the underserved populations of Baja California. To attain educational outcomes, the Flying Samaritans' branches work both to educate their volunteers, who, in many instances, are pre-health professionals, but also to educate their populations to provide more preventive and sustainable care.



I was contacted several months ago by the predental coordinator, Victoria Vongkaysone, also a predental student

at SDSU, asking me if I could work with them at the Tijuana clinic. Always interested in new volunteering experiences and getting to know more predental students, I agreed. One group left at about 5 am with Victoria, on December 11, to travel down and get things ready for action. I was told to meet at 7 am, at a specified place in San Diego, and go with the second group to cross the international border, the clinic location being a little difficult to find. Indeed, it was!



I found a basically equipped dental room with functional used equipment and a group of very enthusiastic ladies ready, willing, and able to help.

Basic care is provided, including emergencies, examinations, extractions, and restorations; no endo, ortho, perio, prosthetics, or crown/bridge is provided.

With the help of these students who know where everything is, and who know well how to assist, working was stress-free. The patients we treated were very appreciative of our help and give a good reputation for this clinic. It is simple,



it is straightforward, but it is magical in how it shows disadvantaged people we care about them and what to help.



They need more volunteers to chip in and help, as some of their monthly clinics have been canceled, with no dental provider available. From my perspective, it is a joy to help, which is why I volunteer every chance I can get. Moreover, working with young people who are groomed to become professionals gives me more energy and faith in the future of our profession.

You can contact Victoria or me at our email addresses below. Please consider giving of yourself to people who will appreciate you; giving back a little to the world. In closing, I would remind you of what some wise people have said about giving.

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