

A STUDENT-RUN FREE CLINIC PROJECT: LESSONS IN COMPASSION, COMMUNITY, AND COURAGE

Ellen Beck^{1*}, Isabel Dominguez¹, Kalodia Toma¹

1* Corresponding author: University of California, San Diego, CA, USA
lightstreams@gmail.com

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For 25 years, UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project has provided free high-quality care to underserved communities, while inspiring the next generation of health professionals. Free thorough ongoing care is provided in community settings to people who have nowhere to turn and do not qualify for access to care.

The clinic philosophy has four tenets: empowerment - creating environments where patients take charge of their lives and achieve wellbeing, a humanistic approach - embodying Rogerian principles of empathy, respect, and self-awareness, a transdisciplinary model, one where the patient and community are the teacher. This philosophy permeates the life of the clinic. These values are taught, modeled, expected, and observed in curricular components throughout the four years of medical school. 250 medical, 75 pharmacy, and 100 predoctoral students are involved each year as well as students in law, social work, and acupuncture.

Students learn to be healers, artists, teachers as they become health professionals. At each clinic session student leaders gather the team in a large circle, and lead a sharing of recent stories and experiences reflecting the core tenets. All work is directly supervised by licensed clinicians, many of whom were once free clinic students. During the era of COVID, care became virtual. Promoters helped patients learn to use

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Zoom to receive care. Visit attendance increased to 100%. Our Spanish language empowerment group met online. The clinic already provided healthy food bags to patients at medical visits. Students and volunteers organized to deliver food and medication to people's homes. ■