

SMU and UC Davis Students Team to Help Patients in Sacramento

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When Thanh Hua, a podiatry student in the Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (DPM) program at California School of Podiatric Medicine (CSPM), a school within Samuel Merritt University (SMU), set out to create a new healthcare option for the uninsured, she turned to her undergraduate school, UC Davis. In a conversation with friends, Hua learned that UC Davis School of Medicine has a free community health clinic in the city of Sacramento, Clínica Tepati.

“My family and I immigrated to the US in 2002 and we were fortunate to receive free healthcare from the state as new immigrants,” explains Hua. “It made me appreciate the importance of healthcare for those who cannot afford to be a part of the health insurance system. I have always been grateful for the

care and have wanted to give back whenever I can.”

Clínica Tepati is a student-run clinic, located off of 18th and J Street, staffed by medical and student volunteers of UC Davis School of



DPM students Martha Golidk, James Wilk, Thanh Hua, Dr. Amy Duckwolf, Anup Patel and Tiffany Hoh at the Clínica Tepati in Sacramento

Medicine. But none of the student volunteers specialized in podiatric medicine. This inspired Hua with the idea to create the “Podiatry Clinic” staffed by DPM students from SMU with the mission to provide free podiatric care and

diabetic foot care education to the uninsured and underinsured community living in the Greater Sacramento Area.

“Since its establishment in 1974, this is the first time that Clínica Tepati is able to provide podiatric care to its patients,” said Hua. “UC Davis School of Medicine has seven student-run clinics, and I am not aware of any other ones besides Clínica Tepati that provides podiatric care.”

When Hua asked her classmates if anyone was interested in working at the Sacramento clinic there was a mad dash from the second-year DPM students to get their name on the list. Since the Podiatry Clinic opened last November, nearly a dozen DPM students commute to Sacramento one Saturday a month to provide podiatric care to the patients. Volunteer podiatrist Amy Duckworth, DPM FACFAS, who works at the Northern California Orthopedic Centers in Carmichael, supervises the DPM

students at Clínica Tepati.

“I think a multidisciplinary approach to medicine is paramount to patient care,” said Dr. Duckworth. “At the student level it is crucial to gain exposure to not only the academic aspects of medical specialties but also to the social aspects of navigating in the medical field to ultimately provide the best patient care.”

“This experience working at Clínica Tepati has not only been really rewarding, being able to give back to the community, but also very educational. We have been learning different techniques from two DPMs who are not faculty members,” said Tiffany Hoh, DPM student at SMU.

The groundwork for the Podiatric Clinic has been educational for many of the students. It included applying for grants and involving other students from different disciplines in the planning of the clinic. Hua says it was important for her and classmates to work collaboratively with existing resources.

“On occasion, my colleagues and I have also taught medical and physician assistant student volunteers on how to take podiatric physical exams as well as learn how to manage specific ailments such as foot ulcers,” said Hua. “UC Davis undergraduate student volunteers at the clinic have been fascinated by our work, and I am glad to be able to promote the podiatry profession and what we do at SMU.”

Even though the DPM students do not get paid for their service, they know they are gaining invaluable real-world experience by volunteering with patients in a community setting in addition to their required clinical rotations. The students agree that the more patients of different backgrounds they treat, and the more clinical confidence and competency they gain, the more likely they will become culturally-aware podiatrists.

“I’ll never forget during the first clinic day, a patient was diagnosed and treated for plantar fasciitis,” said Hua. “The patient came back during the second clinic day grateful that her excruciating and burning pain, which lasted nearly six months, was alleviated after the treatment she received from us.”

The majority of the patients seen are Spanish-speakers. That is nothing new for DPM student James Wilk who has worked with patients in San Ysidro, a community in San Diego County. The area is home to the world's busiest border crossing, where U.S. Interstate 5 crosses into Mexico at Tijuana.

“This clinic is a perfect opportunity to create an environment of service and understanding of a different demographic,” explains Wilk. “It’s been invaluable for my education as a podiatry student and as a person. I have an opportunity to gain effective multicultural interaction skills in communication with patients through interpreters.”

At the end of the year Hua and her fellow classmates plan to write and present an Annual Report for CSPM with patient statistics and diagnoses. The report will also feature the working relationship with other disciplines from partnering schools.

“This project is the first that is based on the collaboration between SMU and the UC system. I am confident that such collaborative efforts are very effective in establishing strong recognition of the SMU programs,” said Hua.

“I agree,” said Hoh. “The UC Davis students are always very welcoming to us and seem genuinely interested to learn about podiatry. I have really enjoyed the time I have spent getting to know other students, volunteers, and patients who come to Clínica.”

Samuel Merritt University, located in Oakland, California, has been educating health science practitioners who are committed to making a positive difference in diverse communities since 1909. Nearly 1,400 students are enrolled at SMU, with campuses in Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco and San Mateo. The University offers an undergraduate degree in nursing; master's degrees in nursing, occupational therapy, and physician assistant; and doctoral degrees in nursing, physical therapy and podiatric medicine. For more information visit www.samuelmerritt.edu.

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