

It's the Giving Season: WebMD Health Foundation Funds Fellowship in Underserved Health Care For UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic

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Dr. Ellen Beck & Dr. Michelle Johnson discussing a patient's needs.

As a new physician, Michelle Johnson, M.D., could have joined any of several lucrative family practice clinics in California. Instead, this holiday season, she is following her heart, serving the underserved with the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine Student-Run Free Clinic Project.

"This work is important to me," says Johnson, who is among the first WebMD Faculty Fellows in Underserved Health Care working with the UCSD Student-Run Free Clinic Project. "I worked at the clinic as a medical student at UCSD. Returning as a physician, I am looking forward to being a listener, healer and teacher in this special environment."

Johnson is one of three individuals who will be funded this year by a two-year \$240,000 fellowship grant from WebMD Health Foundation, a San Diego-based national foundation dedicated to "improving the quality of healthcare through education, access and innovative collaborations." The foundation allows clinic leadership to determine how many part or full-time fellowships will be awarded during the two years, based on clinic need and candidate availability.

The UCSD Student-Run Free Clinic Project is a 10-year-old university/community partnership of volunteers led by students at the UC San Diego School of Medicine. Undergraduate, medical and pharmacy students, faculty and community health professionals join together to provide health care and social services to the underserved at three separate clinics each week. This fellowship creates an opportunity to train more healthcare professionals interested in providing high quality comprehensive outpatient health care to the uninsured and underserved and to expand the project's impact.

Patient in need of pain relief visits acupuncturist, Aaron Cook.

"We were simply blown away after touring the UCSD Student-Run Free Clinic," said WebMD Health Foundation Executive Director, Dixie Newman. "What a perfect example of how to increase access through innovation and education. What impressed us the most is that, along with providing innovative high quality healthcare, the program is educating new physicians about the importance of providing healthcare for the underserved."

Johnson added, "There's an atmosphere of lovely excitement because students are so excited to be helping patients at this stage in their career. They provide such enthusiasm and warmth. There's no other way I would rather have started my professional career."

"We are very grateful to WebMD Health Foundation," said clinic founder and Director, Ellen Beck, M.D., Clinical Professor, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, UCSD School of Medicine. "We have created a humanistic, patient-centered environment that addresses our community's unmet healthcare needs one person,

one family at a time. From pharmacy to dentistry to integrative medicine and social services, this fellowship will support young leaders who have completed all their training, licensing and residency, and are choosing to return to us."

The Fellows

Johnson will be joined by Sussi Yamagushi, D.D.S, and acupuncturist, Aaron Cook, LAc, Pacific College of Oriental Medicine instructor.

"It's important to me to see this level of care available to all," says Cook. "Many patients can't pay \$70 for an office visit. Acupuncture relieves stress, anxiety, tension... things that people without means deal with everyday. I see improvement and empowerment in every single person who visits the clinic."

All three fellows were student volunteers with the Free Clinic project. Johnson completed medical school at UCSD in 2003, completed her family medicine residency in northern California, and has returned to be the Underserved Health Care Fellow.

Yamaguchi was a pre-dental student leader of the dental component of the free clinic project. She completed her dental training in San Francisco and has returned to be the first WebMD Dental Fellow.

Aaron Cook completed his four year acupuncture degree with Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, which has partnered with the free clinic project, offering free acupuncture services for over 10 years at two of the free clinic sites. With the WebMD fellowship funding, the clinic project is able to offer acupuncture services, under the guidance of Mr. Cook, at the Baker Elementary site as well.

"The fact that these young people have been UCSD student leaders, have left to complete their training and then have returned to be our fellows, to serve the community, and train the next generation of students, is very meaningful and a source of inspiration for the students and me," said Beck. "This is the first grant WebMD Health Foundation has ever awarded to a UCSD School of Medicine program and we are honored to receive it."

UCSD Student-Run Free Clinic Project

Founded in 1997, by Beck and a group of medical students, the UCSD Student Run Free Clinic has served more than 7,000 patients, providing over 20,000 visits, at three clinic sites. The first two sites were established in space donated by local churches in downtown San Diego and Pacific Beach where the students serve primarily adults, working poor and the street homeless. By October 1998, a third site opened at Baker Elementary School, expanding the services to women, children, and families in the Mountain View community.

The clinic project is a student-run endeavor, under the supervision of the fellows, residents and licensed practitioners. The project introduces future physician, pharmacists and others to every aspect of a healthcare career, including logistics, organization, and administrative details in addition to caring for the patients.

Most patients are "working poor," meaning they earn slightly more than the limited earnings cutoff to qualify for public programs, but not enough to afford private insurance. The clinics provide access to a variety of volunteer professionals: physicians, dentists, social workers, lawyers and acupuncturists. Medications and lab work are donated or purchased by the clinic project for patients at a discount.

In addition, a street homeless outreach team goes out several times a month providing basic advice to those on the street, and encouraging follow-up at one of the three clinic sites.

"This fellowship allows us to create an environment that inspires people at various stages in their career to serve the underserved," said Beck. "We all work together; physicians, nurses, pharmacists, with the same goal: to help others take charge of their lives and achieve well-being."

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