

May 22, 2017 | By Jackie Carr

Student-Run Free Clinic Project at UC San Diego Honored by American Psychiatric Association

On Sunday, May 21, the Student Run Free Clinic Project at UC San Diego was recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) for excellence in caring for the community. For two decades, the Student-Run Free Clinic Project has helped people of all ages and circumstances access high-quality health care, regardless of their ability to pay. The project assists community members with a range of critical health services, including psychiatric care.

“The American Psychiatric Association and the UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project share a vision of a healthy community where high-quality humanistic health services, including psychiatric diagnosis and treatment, are readily available and accessible to all,” said Ellen Beck, MD, executive director, Student-Run Free Clinic Project, UC San Diego School of Medicine. “We thank the APA for helping us to care for San Diegans who have nowhere else to turn.”

Each year, the APA honors a group in the local community that reflects the APA’s own mission of working together to ensure humane care and effective treatment for persons with mental illness, including those with substance use disorders. The Student-Run Free Clinic Project was selected as a beneficiary of the “APA Gives Back Program.”

“The UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project provides much needed care to many,” said Maria A. Oquendo, MD, PhD, president of the American Psychiatric Association. “The APA Gives Back program is a way for the APA to show our support for the local community.”

According to the National Alliance on Mental illness, approximately 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. experiences mental illness in a given year. That’s more than 43 million adults nationally and more than 185,000 adults in San Diego County.



Ellen Beck, MD, executive director, Student-Run Free Clinic Project, UC San Diego School of Medicine.

Since the inception of the UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project, more than 100,000 free clinic patient visits have taken place, including primary and specialty care for cardiovascular, ophthalmologic and psychiatric needs. Free mental health services include outpatient psychiatric services, therapy and counselling. Prescriptions, lab work and related services are available at no charge. More than 90 percent of free clinic patients have chronic conditions requiring on-going care.

Under Beck's leadership, in collaboration with community and professional partners, the project is run by a core group of faculty, staff and students from UC San Diego School of Medicine and Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. The program offers the services of licensed professionals from the university and community, including physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, pharmacists, acupuncturists, dentists, lawyers, social workers and community health promoters.

Beck and the Student-Run Free Clinic Project also conduct a national faculty development training program called, "Addressing the Health Needs of the Underserved." More than 250 medical and dental school faculty have completed the program. Additionally, more than 20 student-run free clinic projects across the country have been started based on the UC San Diego model, including clinics at Harvard, University of Hawaii, University of Kentucky, Lexington, and a medical school in Frankfurt, Germany.

Beck was recently honored by UC San Diego for Exemplary Stewardship for ensuring that donors, volunteers, corporate partners and foundations understand the true impact and importance of their involvement with the UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project.

"When people see the passion in our work, see the students inspired, see the gratitude and dedication of patients to manage their health despite enormous challenges, the reward is tangible and meaningful," said Beck. "We are deeply grateful to all donors whether they give time, expertise or financial support."

Beck is a recipient of the 2010 James Irvine Foundation Leadership award, which recognizes and supports individuals who advance innovative and effective solutions to significant state issues that impact quality of life. She was honored as a *WebMD Magazine* 2011 Health Hero and with a 2014 Kennedy Center Stephen Sondheim award for being an inspirational teacher.

The 2017 Gala for the UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project will take place on Tuesday, May 23. To learn more about the clinic and to support its services, visit meded.ucsd.edu/freeclinic

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