

May 15, 2013 | By Jade Griffin

UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project Receives Boost as Part of May 16 Gala

Students pledge future earnings to support the free medical clinic

The UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project will host its 15th annual fundraiser gala, “Light up the Night” on Thursday, May 16. All proceeds will benefit the free clinic project, which provides high quality medical, dental, pharmacy, acupuncture, legal and social services to San Diego’s uninsured, working poor and homeless. More than 2,000 San Diegans annually rely on the comprehensive, integrative health services offered at the free clinic project. As part of this year’s event, 41 third-year medical students who work in the clinic have each committed up to \$5,000 of their future earnings to support the Student-Run Free Clinic Project, bringing their total pledges to more than \$160,000.

“Each year, the Student-Run Free Clinic Project helps thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds access high quality health care, regardless of their ability to pay,” said Ellen Beck, MD, clinical professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “Our patients cannot afford insurance or clinic visits, and do not qualify for most government programs. The support of our remarkable students, alumni, donors, volunteers and community partners will allow us to continue to make a difference in the lives of countless patients—whether they are coming to us with an urgent need, chronic illness or other concerns.”



Established in 1997, more than 500 students from UC San Diego School of Medicine, Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, California Western School of Law, San Diego State University School of Social Work, California State University San Marcos School of Nursing, Pacific College of Oriental Medicine and the UC San Diego Pre-Dental Society are involved in the day-to-day management of the free clinic project. The students work under the direct supervision of 100 licensed professionals, including physicians, pharmacists, dentists, lawyers and social workers.

Dylan Mann is a medical student who has worked for two years at the Student-Run Free Clinic Project. He pledged to give back to the project after his graduation from medical school.

“Along with many of my colleagues, I am inclined to donate to the UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic because this allows more vulnerable San Diegans to access essential health care and social services,” said Mann. “By committing a portion of our future salaries, we hope to inspire others, inviting them to join us in supporting this vital community resource.”

Since its inception, more than 35,000 clinic visits have taken place, offering transdisciplinary health care services, including specialty care for cardiovascular, ophthalmologic and mental health needs. Prescriptions, lab work and related services are available at no charge. More than 85 percent of the patients have chronic conditions in need of ongoing care, especially diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma and depression. The project has four longstanding community partners that provide space for the clinic services throughout the region: Baker Elementary in Southeast San Diego, First Lutheran Church Downtown, Pacific Beach United Methodist Church and Golden Avenue Elementary/ Lemon Grove Academy for the Humanities and Sciences in Lemon Grove.

The Student-Run Free Clinic Project also serves as a model of care for other U.S. cities. The program runs an onsite Fellowship in Underserved Health Care—the first of its kind in the country. More than 150 faculty and health professionals from 30 states have taken part of the project’s faculty development training and started more than 15 other student-run free clinic projects across the nation.

“At the clinic, medical students are taught a humanistic approach to care,” said Beck. “They are taught to be healers and teachers, creating environments where their patients can take charge of their health and their lives. They also learn that the community will be their teacher. It is beautiful to see the passion and compassion of our students as well as the commitment of our patients who are often facing great life challenges.”

Beck continued: “It has also been very moving to see the number of former free clinic students who have now returned to work at and volunteer at the free clinic project—including family physicians, dermatologists, orthopedists, pediatricians, pharmacists, dentists and internists.”

The biggest challenge, according to Beck, is meeting operational expenses. “The unmet need for care for the uninsured in San Diego is huge and continues to increase, while funding from federal sources has decreased.”

With the support of community partners and in-kind gifts, Beck estimates that the clinic project provides an equivalent of \$1.6 million in free medications to local San Diegans each year and several million in donated services.

For more information or to support the center with a gift, please call 858-246-1550 or visit http://meded.ucsd.edu/freeclinic/benefit_dinner.php and click “Donate Now.” Those interested in making a difference can also participate in the event’s online auction by visiting <http://biddingforgood.com/UCSDfreeClinic/lightupthenight>.

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