WESTERNU HELPS SHEPHERD CARE HARBOR MEGA-CLINIC TO
Hundreds of thousands of Southern California residents are without health insurance and do not have a medical home. The problem is staggering and requires a massive response. Care Harbor (https://careharbor.org/) has addressed this need by holding nine free mega health clinics in downtown Los Angeles over the past several years, serving about 25,000 patients and providing close to 140,000 free services for an estimated value of care exceeding $20 million.

Western University of Health Sciences, in collaboration with other major local institutions, answered the call to help bring Care Harbor to Pomona. WesternU played a key role in planning the event, and hundreds of WesternU students, faculty and staff volunteered April 27-28, 2019 at Care Harbor.
Care Harbor Fairplex provided free medical, dental and vision care to about 1,400 patients over two days with the help of more than 1,700 volunteers, said Care Harbor CEO Donald Manelli. The value of care delivered was estimated at more than $1 million.

“It’s not really Care Harbor that’s doing this. This is the 1,700 volunteers who are here, drawn from this community,” Manelli said on the first day of the clinic. “Care Harbor is this community coming together to take care of its own. That’s the part of this event that I’m proudest of. It’s really a grassroots response to a huge community need, and we’re very grateful to those who have made it happen.”
Among the key local supporters were WesternU, Fairplex, Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis and Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center (PVHMC).

“What I love about Care Harbor is the community coming together, providing this kind of care to this community,” said PVHMC Foundation Vice President of Development James Dale. “Working with Fairplex and with WesternU, Pomona Valley is collaborating to provide the best that we can in all aspects to those that need this kind of care, who deserve this kind of care. People deserve the finest health care possible.”

“Pomona is a community that takes care of itself,” said Miguel Santana, president and CEO of the Los Angeles County Fair Association, noting that Care Harbor’s first day at Fairplex was also Pomona Beautification Day. “Today is a day where residents from all over Pomona are giving back. So it is so appropriate that WesternU, which is proudly based here, is such an essential partner.

WesternU volunteers are everywhere, providing service to Pomona, the San Gabriel Valley and beyond, Solis said.

“At every major health fair that I have, WesternU is there either doing eye exams, providing dental care, or you are taking care of those that don’t have insurance or that are underinsured. So a big round of applause to all of you.”
WesternU College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific (COMP) Vice Dean David Connett, DO ’84, spoke on behalf of WesternU. He acknowledged the work of COMP Assistant Dean of Education Natalie Nevins, DO ’97, MSHPE ’97, who serves as medical director of Care Harbor but could not attend because she was deployed overseas as an Army flight surgeon. Nevins and WesternU have been mainstays of past Care Harbor events in Los Angeles.

She helped plan Care Harbor at Fairplex, and multiple WesternU faculty also contributed, including Instructor of PA Education and College of Health Sciences Community Liaison Elizabeth Maugh, DFAAPA, MS, PA-C, COMP Chair and Associate Professor of Family Medicine Dat Q. Trinh, DO ’03, and College of Optometry Professor Robert Gordon, OD, FAAO, FPNAP.

“The biggest thing I noticed is it takes three of us to do what Dr. Nevins usually does by herself,” Maugh said. “We’re very grateful for all the things she pre-planned. But of course, planning for a big event like this, there are a lot of changes and questions and things like that. The three of us have been helping make those decisions.”
 Volunteers often don’t see the prep work involved – setting up exam spaces, making sure medications arrive, and coordinating schedules.

“This is the first year we worked in the background making sure everything is there for doctors, patients and students to have a smooth experience. I think it’s a really eye-opening process,” Trinh said.

Care Harbor provided veterinary services for the first time at Fairplex. An estimated 60 to 70 dogs and cats received veterinary care.

“The veterinary clinic was a pilot program and ran smoothly,” Manelli said. “We will repeat and expand it next time.”

Patients dropped off their pets with WesternU College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) faculty and students before entering the building to get care for themselves. The WesternU East Valley Spay/Neuter Center in Van Nuys closed on Saturday so the entire staff could volunteer at Fairplex. WesternU CVM partnered with the Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health Program and the Amanda Foundation (https://amandafoundation.org/) to provide veterinary services at Care Harbor.
CVM Assistant Professor and Hospital Director of the WesternU Spay/Neuter Center Zarah Hedge, DVM ’09, MPH, DACVPM, DABVP (Shelter Medicine Practice) said volunteering at Care Harbor brings One Health into practice for WesternU students. All WesternU students go through Interprofessional Education (IPE) where they work with students in other disciplines on cases to understand and appreciate everyone’s contributions to health care.

“Now they get to see a real-world example of that,” Hedge said. “Inside, all the other colleges are providing human health care, and outside we are doing veterinary care for those people. The veterinary students really get some great hands-on experience today. They are doing exams, giving vaccines. They are talking to clients and getting some hands-on, real-world experience.”

Hedge said she was one of four CVM Class of 2009 graduates to volunteer at Care Harbor – two who serve as CVM faculty and two who practice in the area. They referred clients to local providers for spay and neuter services and other medical issues.

“And our goal, our hope for future events is that we can actually bring spay-neuter services here to the site so we will be able to do everything here,” she said.

Pomona resident Claudia Guerrero brought her Boxer, Lovely, for deworming and flea medication.
“I thought it was great,” Guerrero said. “Everybody was nice. They all helped me out and answered all of my questions. And they took care of my dog.”

Guerrero was fitted for new glasses and had blood work done. She hadn’t seen a doctor in more than 10 years because of what she described as negative experiences in the past.

“I would go in for one thing and they would only treat me for that one thing. They don’t want to do extra,” Guerrero said. “I had a great experience here. Look, I’m leaving with a smile on my face. They were very, very helpful. It’s been a long time since I walked out happy from somewhere that had to do with doctors.”

College of Optometry students started the day with energy and enthusiasm. A group of about 60 students gathered for last-minute instructions from College of Optometry Associate Dean Raymond Maeda, OD, FAAO, prior to seeing patients at 8 a.m. They clapped and cheered whenever a classmate entered the vision center. The College brought together about 25 faculty, staff and local volunteer optometrists and more than 120 students to provide vision care to nearly 700 patients during the event.
WesternU plays large role in Care Harbor Fairplex
from WesternU Video
Third-year College of Optometry student Joshua Roberts said he enjoys volunteering at local events.

“It’s great to be able offer services to people who otherwise probably couldn’t afford it,” he said. “It’s awesome everyone is willing to dedicate a little time to help. The area we live in has a lot of underserved people who maybe don’t have access to health care. They need it the most. To get them the health care they need is really important.”

College of Dental Medicine student Sheri Jones said she was able to treat patients who did not have a dental home or the finances to get the care they need. The patients will be referred to a dental home, and some may become patients of the WesternU Dental Center.

“I just thought it’s amazing that so many people are coming together to provide care to people who really need it,” Jones said. “The patients are so grateful. They’re just eager and ready to get the care.”

Care Harbor provides continuity of care to its patients. Patients who do not have a primary care doctor are assigned a medical home before they leave Care Harbor. Patients also receive information on their eligibility for Medi-Cal and other programs.

First-year College of Dental Medicine student Jocelyne Ruelas helped check dental patients out and provided referrals.

“I really enjoy being involved in my community, especially because I’m Latina, and many of my patients are as well,” she said. “My community has given me so much. I wanted to give back.”
Ruelas was born in Guadalajara, Mexico, grew up in Fontana, and is the first in her family to attend a professional school.

“Along my path I had professors, counselors and other people who always encouraged me,” she said. “I want to pass that on to all the communities we are serving today. Hopefully one day I will be returning (to Care Harbor) as a dentist.”

College of Podiatric Medicine alumna Chandler Hubbard, DPM ’18, volunteered as a WesternU student at Care Harbor LA and came to Fairplex as a first-year podiatry resident at Chino Hills Medical Center.
“I decided to volunteer because as a student I volunteered and gave back to my community in Los Angeles. I was given the opportunity to be here and I wanted to give back to the community surrounding Pomona and WesternU,” Hubbard said. “To be able to give back the things that I learned there to the community around me is something that is near and dear to my heart.”

First-year COMP student Brianna Ahn took patients’ histories, performed physicals and presented cases to preceptors and attending physicians.

“I’m learning more about how health care is given. It’s great. I haven’t participated in this type of clinic before,” she said. “I definitely enjoy volunteering. The best way to learn about medicine is to talk to patients and the people we serve. Opportunities like this is where we get to understand humanism in medicine and really get a clear perspective on patients’ health needs in the community.”

First-year College of Health Sciences Physician Assistant student Steven Orton said volunteering is a way to learn outside the classroom and to put theory into practice.

“Doing community outreach is an important part of my life. It’s one of the reasons I chose this profession as a career,” he said. “It’s part of the mission statement for WesternU. It’s nice to see students who attend our school abide by that mission.”

Fontana resident Patricia Green received a thorough vision exam from multiple College of Optometry students and faculty. She last had her eyes checked about three years ago. She has problems reading small print, so she was fitted with and received new glasses on the spot courtesy of Healing California (https://www.healingcaliforniacharity.org/).
“Everybody was really nice and helpful and friendly. I couldn’t believe that part, because most of the time when you come sometimes people are kind of on edge or rushing, but these people were very patient and asked me if I needed anything,” Green said. “I was really excited about it.”

Others she talked to didn’t want to come to Care Harbor because they thought it would take all day, but she was finished within a few hours of lining up Saturday morning.

“I can see things now. I won’t have to take a picture with my phone and then make it bigger so I can see it,” Green said. “I’m glad I came. I got my glasses.”
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