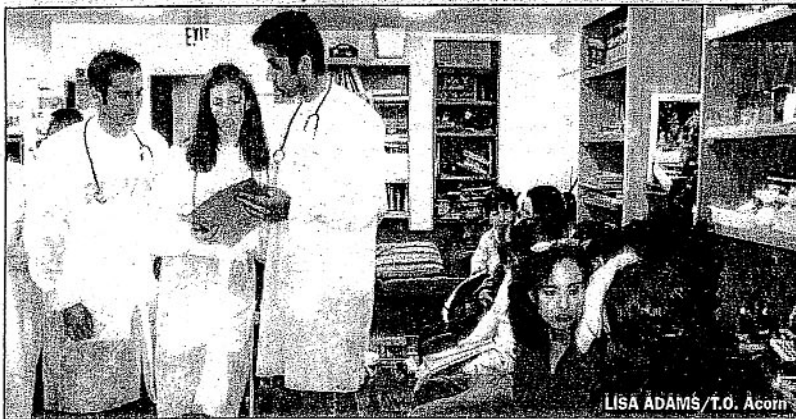


Students volunteer at low-cost medical clinic, more help is needed



LISA ADAMS/T.O. Acorn

CALLING ALL MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS – Student volunteers Matthew Jacobs, a Thousand Oaks High School senior, Michelle Levy, an Oak Park High School sophomore, and Anush Kalbasi, a Thousand Oaks High School senior, look over a patient's chart during Westminster Free Clinic held at Villa Garcia

By Tina Anderson
Special to the T.O. Acorn

High school sophomore Oren Gabriel tucks his study notes back into his pocket under his medical scrub coat. He'll have to study later for his Advanced Placement history test since he's busy at the moment helping patients at the Westminster Free Medical Clinic receive vital healthcare.

"It's so much more important to help someone," said Gabriel.

Every Wednesday evening, eight to 10 students from Thousand Oaks, Oak Park, Westlake and Agoura high schools volunteer at the Westminster Clinic, serving alongside volunteer doctors, nurses,

and medical advocates. For students, it's a valuable hands-on opportunity to explore their interest in the medical profession and give back to the community.

"It's an awakening experience, realizing how lucky you are," said Gabriel, eyeing the line of 30-plus patients who've been outside for at least an hour, waiting for a chance to see the doctor.

Dependent on volunteer support, the clinic can only service approximately 15 patients during its operational hours of 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Until more doctors, nurses, and specialists volunteer, many patients will continue to be turned away.

The clinic offers a basic medi-

cal exam, free prescription drugs, lab tests, and free x-ray/radiology services to those who do not have access to medical insurance.

"The students, our volunteers, they really do a great job and we appreciate them coming," said Lisa Safaeinili, Director of External Affairs for the Many Mansions non-profit affordable housing organization. Many Mansions provides free space for the Westminster Clinic in the community room at Villa Garcia Apartments.

As the patients come in, Justine



Free clinic
Low-cost medical clinic out out plea for help

Thousand Oaks Acorn

Chiou, Michelle Levy, Matthew Jacobs, Igor Tregub – all student clinic volunteers – go through an interview and on-going training process which includes taking patient histories, assisting with other physical patient processing, helping their peers with procedures, and training new student volunteers.

"It's a learning process," said Anusha Kalbasi, Thousand Oaks High School senior, and volunteer student manager for the past two and a half years. "We take a blood

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Clinic

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Additional medical staff is badly needed at the low-cost clinic

pressure and the nurse checks it."

Three separate groups of high school students and professional healthcare volunteers rotate clinic sessions on a weekly basis. Volunteers give approximately 10-12 hours of their time to the clinic beyond school and/or full-time employment. Student volunteers also raise money via car washes to supplement the costs of x-rays and medical tests.

Medical Advocate Espy Gonzalez, a human service agency representative, works with prospective patients who may actually be eligible for insurance and other medical care but who are facing language barriers or other administrative problems in accessing benefits.

Gonzalez said she occasionally brings her four children (ages 17, 11, 9, and 4) with her to the Clinic in order to set a good example of volunteer service.

Cindy Hughes and Terry Gehr, both RNs and clinic medical advocates, emphasize the need for other health professionals to volunteer.

"We just helped a gentleman who'd been trying to get in to see us for the past three weeks, and he finally got through the line tonight,"

treated."

The Westminster Clinic recently secured a half million-dollar Health Matters grant through the California Endowment Foundation to be used during the course of the next three years. The money provides necessary, but expensive medical equipment, medical supplies and tests, office supplies and some volunteer stipends.

Dr. Steven Kamajian started the Westminster Clinic five years ago and still actively volunteers at the clinic and mentors students. Joining Kamajian is Dr. Chalmers Armstrong. A volunteer with Westminster Clinic since last year, Armstrong responded to Dr. Kamajian's volunteer advertisement in a church bulletin and reiterates his plea for additional healthcare volunteers and donations.

"We need specialists – dentists, dermatologists, urologists, and more," said Armstrong.

For questions regarding volunteering or equipment and financial donations, please contact Cindy Vincent at 818-879-1360.