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Free clinic here to serve Simi students among the volunteers By Sophia Fischer sfischer@theacorn.com

Every Wednesday evening around 5 p.m. children, adults and the elderly line up outside the Korean New Life church in Thousand Oaks to receive free, noninvasive healthcare.

Inside, volunteer doctors, nurses, counselors and social workers set up a makeshift clinic that will see as many as 60 patients in an evening.

Students from high schools in Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Agoura, Calabasas, Moorpark, Westlake and Oak Park serve as a volunteer support staff checking in patients, creating medical charts, taking reading vital signs and translating between doctors and non-English-speaking patients.

"I enjoy being here more than at my practice. You don't have to deal with HMOs, insurance and patients complaining," said Dr. Steve Kamajian, founder of the grassroots Westminster Free Clinic, which is named for the church where Kamajian began the program in 1994.

"Everyone here is so happy to be getting care. How can you have greater joy in life than helping people?" Kamajian said.

All of the patients are uninsured; many are Hispanic—some are illegal immigrants—and are unable to afford a visit to a doctor's office. They come for a variety of ailments, from simple canker sores to more serious diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and kidney problems.

It all began as a one-man effort a decade ago at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Westlake Village. Kamajian conducted health exams for the homeless and low-income people who came to eat at the church once a week.

"Steve would come in with his black medical bag and portable massage table and examine patients in a broom closet," said Cindy Vinson, clinic board member. "I thought, 'We need some organization here.'"

Kamajian's idea quickly caught on, attracting both volunteers and patients. The clinic has moved to several different locations, setting up shop wherever the need is greatest. Thousands of uninsured people have been helped, including more than 4,000 last year alone.

"Healthcare problems in the United States are easily solvable if the country approaches it with simple common sense," Kamajian said. "So many people are doubly insured. We need to do something where we pool all these resources so that everyone has coverage."

Besides healthcare, the program offers free prescriptions, resource and referral advocacy, legal services, bilingual counseling services and career training for teens and medical residency students.

Program Director Lisa Safaeinili recruits willing physicians and searches out grants and private donations to help pay for the lab tests, X-rays, medications and other



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