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Migrant Outreach Project Makes Significant Impact on San Diego Day Laborers

By Nancy Madrid

“Faith is not something to grasp, it is a state to grow into.” Indeed, the previous words spoken by Mahatma Gandhi reflect the emotional experience of many San Diego county migrant workers who on Sunday, May 27, 2007 were once more the beneficiaries of the mobile clinic provided by the Migrant

Outreach Project. For nearly a year, the hardworking, yet impoverished migrants have gradually renewed their faith in human kindness and hope for better health through the efforts of the Latino Medical Student Association and attending physicians at UCSD’s School of Medicine.

After celebrating Sunday mass and a breakfast provided by Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, the approximately fifty migrants lined up for free medical consultations. For just a short wait, migrants were able to speak with medical experts about symptoms, pains, and basically any general health concern. Some patients had their glucose levels tested, while others were prescribed medicines ranging from Lipitor to Advil; all were given medical advice. Although the majority of patients suffer from minor health problems such as pains and common colds, they are very likely to have more severe long term problems if left untreated.

In addition, the project members offer more than just solutions to health problems, they offer emotional support and encouragement to the migrants.

“I like coming to the clinic, not only because I know I will be helped if I am sick, but because the doctors are caring, like friends”, one patient said.

As the initial project coordinator, first year medical student Shirin Alonzo stated, “At first the migrants were shy and didn’t know who we were, but after visiting with the medical students and staff a few times they came to trust us and realized they have support from people they didn’t know even cared for them.”

Care packages with basic items such as toiletries, vitamins, hats, and sunscreen were also distributed to the migrants. Many of these products are critical to the migrant workers who spend long hours working outdoors, directly exposed to sunlight and other harsh conditions.

The project also offers health information on topics such as safe lifting techniques, alcohol abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Because camp residents are paid very low wages or send the majority of their income to provide for their families in Mexico, the Migrant Outreach Project also conducts clothing collections and allows the migrants to select and take as they wish.

Other groups also assisted in providing services such as the UCSD’s Chicanos/Latinos for Community Medicine (CCM) and other volunteers and international doctors. The migrants are very grateful to all. Likewise, the medical students and staff find they too have been positively impacted by the project.

Medical and CCM students have the chance to gain real medical experience by focusing on interacting with patients, taking vitals and filling out medical history forms. For example, medical student Helen Sui perfected testing blood sugar levels of Sinaloa native Raul Soto Roman. He was nervous about the procedure but quickly relaxed with Helen’s friendly and gentle demeanor.

Working on the project also helps medical students gain perspective on their career and future.

“With the help of the international doctors and the medical students, we as undergraduates are able to gain good experience. I definitely plan on continuing this type of work when I become a doctor, there is such a shortage of doctors that we just need more people willing to help” said third year undergraduate Lisandro Maya.

Due to its success, the Migrant Outreach Project has gained support from outside organizations and individuals who have become active members. Many members wish for the project to expand by providing more frequent trips to the camps, as well as increasing the number of locations to be served.

The Migrant Outreach Project has been underway for nearly a year now. It initially began at the UCSD School of Medicine with the support of medical teaching staff, including Dr. Eduardo P. Tanori. Dr. Tanori is highly familiar with the migrant community, having reached out to the Del Mar for over 25 years.

Although the UCSD Migrant Outreach Project is only able to provide the mobile clinic for the community every couple of months, the migrants are never left alone. Our Lady of Mount Carmel from Rancho Penasquitos provides Sunday services, food, and basic provisions on a weekly basis and CCM is involved with a number of border and migrant outreach programs throughout San Diego and Baja California.

Thus, we find that through these simple, yet significant steps to improve the health and well being of migrants in San Diego, many lives have undergone positive transformations. These projects demonstrate that there are many who appreciate their contributions to our society and value their presence in the community. Thus, the Migrant Outreach Project has done much more than offer supplies and medical care to these people, it has often served to both promote and cultivate their faith in humanity and the future.

For more information on how you can help with the UCSD Migrant Outreach Project please visit:

LMSA: <http://www.lmsa.net/chapters-uc-sandiego.htm>

CCM: ccmucsd@googlepages.com.

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