

UCSD Homeless Clinic

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Dental Clinical Director



In January of 1999 the University of California at San Diego's Department of Family and Preventative Medicine began a Free Clinic in the city of Pacific Beach (San Diego). The objective was to provide free care, medical and dental, for the homeless population in the Pacific Beach area (an area without free dental services). The mission of the clinic is for the students and professionals to join together voluntarily to serve the community, learn from one another, and help those in need of medical and dental assistance.

The Free Clinic Project of San Diego is a non-profit organization that receives support from individuals, professional, businesses, foundations and the University of California in the form of individual donations and grants, and donations of medical, dental and pharmaceutical equipment and supplies. The clinic is located at 1561 Thomas Street, at the Pacific Beach Methodist Church.

Each Wednesday from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. the church opens it's doors to the homeless population of Pacific Beach for the Harvest for the Hungary Meal Program. After the meal program those in need of care are able to sign up for medical, dental and other health-related services. The dental clinic is able to take patients by appointment as well as on an emergency basis. Patients are seen until 9:30 p.m.

The clinic began with one dental chair in a small room. The equipment and materials were donated by a few area dentists and setup and cared for by Burkhart Dental supply and clinic volunteers. The support was outstanding. The clinic is now operating with two chairs: one for hygiene and one for treatment.

The services currently offered include exams, x-rays, oral surgery (extractions, etc.), periodontal care (prophy, scaling and root planing, etc.) endodontics, removable prosthodontics (complete, partial dentures and flippers), and some fixed prosthodontics. Hygiene instructions, toothpaste and a toothbrush also are given to patients.

This program is extremely unique in that it allows for volunteer dentists to work with volunteer staff and students in an environment of teaching and caring. The staff includes assistants and hygienists from many of San Diego's dental offices. The students are pre-dental students from UCSD, USD, and SDSU. The students are encouraged to ask questions and assist is simple procedures. I have gotten to know a number of the student volunteers, some of whom will be attending dentals schools with a far broader knowledge of dentistry than their classmates, due to this program.

A second dental clinic site is currently in the works. A product of recently obtained funding, this second clinic will be a mobile one. It will be maintained at the Baker Elementary School in Southeast San Diego, and will address the dental needs, including removable orthodontics, of the children and families of that community.

I would like to thank everyone involved in these projects, including all the volunteer dentists, assistants, hygienists and students. Without their efforts and dedication, many people would be left untreated.

If you are interested in volunteering your time or donating to the clinic you can contact Dr. Sam Halabo at 619-427-0810 or Eric Goldlust at 858-546-8437.*

Dr. Sam Halabo is a member of SDCDS and has a general dentistry practice in Chula Vista. He is one of the directors and clinicians of the UCSD Free Clinic Project of San Diego