Learning through Service

Fortis College-Phoenix Dental Hygiene Students Travel to Mexico



In addition to getting an education that prepares them for professional careers, students at Fortis College-Phoenix Dental Hygiene Program have the opportunity to learn lessons in life – especially how to serve others most in need through use of their professional skills and talents.

On October 19th, 2017, Fortis dental hygiene students from the class of 2017-B and 2018-A, caravanned from Phoenix to Puerto Penasco, Mexico. Accompanying them were Program Director Lori Riedel, instructor Ms. Emily Miller-Lehr, and assistant and translator Judith Chacon. Upon arrival, they set up a temporary clinic to provide health screenings, prophylaxis, nonsurgical periodontal therapy, fluoride treatments, extractions, fillings, and oral hygiene instruction in Spanish to residents. They returned on October 23rd.

To advance their missions, Rocky Point Medical Clinics and Esencial Oral Health collaborate to make the service learning trips possible. "This was our fifth trip to Mexico to provide dental care to those in need," said Fortis Dental Hygiene Program Director Lori Riedel. "Students worked alongside volunteer dentists from the U.S. and Mexico, gaining invaluable learning and experience. It was a win/win opportunity." In addition to dental hygiene services, the patients

received emergency and restorative care from Dr. Rustin Reidhead of Phoenix, Arizona and Dr. Shirley Amador of Puerto Penasco, Mexico.



With each trip, the number of patients treated increases. During the two clinical days the students cared for 159 patients. 50% of patients served are among the most vulnerable: children and adolescent populations. Also gratifying to see was the slow (but steady) increase in those returning for continuing care. The students treated a dozen returning patients from previous trips. The students joined forces with the hard working dentists who completed numerous examinations, 23 restorations and 30 extractions. Working together, it was a very successful trip!

The educational benefits of these outreach missions are numerous. Mya Tharp, a senior dental hygiene student, made her second trip to Mexico this year. "The Mexico volunteer trip is fulfilling not only on a dental hygiene level, but also on a human level. It is a wonderful way to spend a weekend; becoming a better clinician while helping those that do not have access to much needed care. I can honestly say that the opportunity has changed my life, and would highly recommend it to all dental hygiene students that have the opportunity to go!"

Katherine Parkin, a Fortis College junior dental hygiene student, shared these thoughts after her first trip: "Helping others who are less fortunate then I really puts your own life into perspective. Being able to get regular dental care is a privilege everyone should have. The mission trip to Mexico was the most rewarding experience I have ever been a part of". With each successful trip the number of patients served, and students who gain valuable service learning experience, increases.

Helping our neighbors to the south improve oral and overall health is only half the equation. The mission of Esencial Oral Health is *"to provide an educational experience for dental hygiene students, as they provide oral healthcare services and education to those with no other access to care"*.

The next trip is scheduled for early May 2018. Those that would like to help out with in-kind donations (dental supplies, etc.) please contact Esencial Oral Health at 602-697-5339.

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