

Spotlight on: Palomar High School and Southwest High School Clinics

The health centers at Palomar High School in Chula Vista and Southwest High School in San Diego are a three-way partnership between the Scripps Family Medicine Residency Program, San Ysidro Health Center, and the Sweetwater Union High School District. “Because of this three-way commitment, no one party is carrying the full financial burden to support the health centers for the long-term,” explains Dr. Shaila Serpas of Scripps. “That’s really helped us with sustainability issues.”

Scripps provides the residents and the physicians who oversee medical care at the health centers. San Ysidro, an FQHC, provides personnel to work at the health centers and to handle enrollment of students into state and federal insurance programs. San Ysidro also provides additional medical services and resources when students are referred to them from the health centers (which are considered satellite clinics). The school district contributes to the success of the school health centers by providing annual financial support to the budget, the school nurse, the LVN, as well as the facilities at both Southwest and Palomar.

Scripps became involved in school health centers to fulfill its mission to improve health care access and to provide increased training opportunities for its medical residents. “The teen population generally is pretty healthy,” says Dr. Serpas, “so we weren’t seeing many of them in the hospital or in the community clinic where our residents get their training.” Bringing the residents onto school campuses and allowing them to work in the school health centers has been a win-win combination. Residents are a great asset to the school health centers, and the residents benefit by getting more experience treating adolescents and developing the skills they need to effectively communicate with and influence teens. More than half of Scripps’ medical residents also come from the local community and are generally in



Students & residents in Southwest’s mentoring program

their 20s, so they can more easily relate to the teens they’re working with. “Our residents have gone to high school locally and are familiar with a lot of the cultural and social issues that the teens are dealing with,” explains Dr. Serpas. “They do an effective job opening a dialogue with the teens and teaching them how to cope with an immediate health issue or with a chronic condition.” They also empower teens giving them the skills and resources needed to properly use the health care system—rather than avoiding care or waiting until they have a health emergency. This is essential for when students graduate and no longer have access to the school health center.

Residents have also brought another benefit to the students on campus by becoming involved in two kinds of mentoring programs sponsored by Scripps. The first program matches up high school students interested in health care careers with residents in a one-to-one relationship. Currently, there are 15 students participating in this program which has been in existence for three years. The other mentoring program has existed for over 10 years and brings students to the Scripps hospital to experience first-hand what it’s like to work in different health careers. For 8 weeks, high school juniors and seniors get to observe first hand many different jobs at the hospital, such as technicians, pharmacists, EKG techs, and others. “Our goal is to support the

development of a more diverse health profession that reflects the cultural diversity of the community,” says Dr. Serpas. “Our residents help us do this by working with students to prepare themselves academically for a health care career. They’re also able to provide encouragement and guidance that might be lacking for many of these teens.”

For health centers that would like to get medical residents into their health centers, Dr. Serpas recommends reaching out to a medical school if there’s one in close proximity. Other resources are residencies in pediatrics or family medicine. She also recommends partnering with an FQHC that can offer services with a sliding fee and has so many additional resources available. “Creating partnerships with a variety of agencies and involving local community-based organizations has really been the key to our success,” says Dr. Serpas. “We’re really proud of the services our medical residents have provided to students at Palomar and Southwest. And, in turn, we feel we’ve built the skills and confidence of our residents by teaching them how to provide adolescent care with cultural sensitivity and awareness.”

For Scripps, getting involved in school health centers was a new venture when it started 10 years ago. When Scripps was looking into opening a second health center at Southwest High School, Dr. Serpas met with CSHC staff and discovered the many resources CSHC has to offer. “CSHC really helped us assess needs, form partnerships, and decide on the scope of services we could offer,” explains Dr. Serpas. “They also introduced us to a variety of school health center models and showed us what’s being done in other parts of the state. Hearing about what other health centers are doing is really inspiring and keeps us thinking about how we can do more and implement new programs.” Serpas also points out that the technical assistance and personal mentoring she’s received from CSHC have been extremely helpful. Dr. Serpas was so impressed with CSHC she joined its Board of Directors.

The health centers at both Palomar and Southwest have helped many students, but one story stands out in Dr. Serpas’ mind. “Robert” came to the health center with a tremor and nervousness. He’d previously been diagnosed with ADHD, but without health insurance or access to care he was off medication. Robert had been missing a lot of classes at his first high school and had transferred to Palomar, a continuation high school, since he was so far behind academically. At Palomar, he was missing many days of school and failing most of his classes. When he came to the school health center, Robert was found to have an enlarged thyroid and was referred to San Ysidro for additional tests that determined he was suffering from hyperthyroidism. Symptoms include tremors, nervousness and diarrhea which were keeping Robert out of school so often. Robert received treatment and the medication he needed and experienced a dramatic turnaround. He started coming to school consistently and made the honor roll for the first time in his life. A student who had been labeled an academic failure was now on track and able to work toward graduation.

By: Aileen Olson

Started: 2003 (Palomar); 2007 (Southwest)

Sponsors: Scripps Family Medicine Residency Program, San Ysidro Health Center, Sweetwater Union High School District

Facility:

1 treatment/exam room (Palomar);
Nurses office, 2 exam rooms, 3 confidential areas,
waiting room, 2 beds, 1 bathroom (Southwest).

Staff:

Resident, faculty supervisor, FT school nurse
(Palomar)
2 residents, faculty supervisor, school nurse, LVN,
MA/enrollment and eligibility worker (Southwest)

Services:

Medical (Palomar)
Medical, mental health, insurance enrollment
(Southwest)

Student Visits:

120 last school year (Palomar)
1,268 last school year (Southwest)