



Making a Difference



By George Meyer, MD

There are a number of options available for physicians interested in volunteering.

I AM WRITING THIS ON THE DAY designated as the holiday to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. Many have suggested this should be a day "on," meaning we should take this day to volunteer our help to those not as fortunate as we are. There are many volunteer opportunities for physicians, retired or actively practicing in the Sacramento area.

A couple of years ago at the Northern California chapter meeting of the American College of Physicians, many retired physicians lamented they could not volunteer to help their local counties because there was no provision for malpractice coverage. Not so at the **Sacramento County Clinics**. The county provides medical malpractice coverage for those who donate their time to one of the clinics.

The **SSVMS SPIRIT Program**, coordinated by Kristine Wallach, accepts new volunteers at any time, and is specifically seeking physicians with expertise in dermatology, general surgery (hernia repairs), orthopedics, primary care, psychiatry, and rheumatology. To volunteer with any of the programs of the Community Service, Education and Research Fund, download the enrollment form here or call the CSERF office at 916-453-0254.

The **Salud Clinic** opened in Broderick on May 21, 1971, and has been operating at least five days a week since then. It is now in new quarters in West Sacramento, part of the Yolo County Communicare system. Contact David Katz, MD, at 916/376-6400

There are a number of UCD student-run clinics; all operate on Saturdays or Sundays: The **Paul Hom Asian Clinic** was founded in 1971 and is the oldest existing Asian clinic in the United States. **Clinica Tepati** began in 1974 to provide medical care for the underserved Latino population in Sacramento. The **Joan Viteri Clinic** focuses on drug users and sex workers. The **Imani Clinic** opened in 1994 to care for African-Americans, and now serves the medical needs of many African-Americans, Latinos, Russians and Asians in Oak Park. The **Bayanihan Clinic**, which opened in February, 2002, provides care for underserved Filipino and Hmong patients. The **Shifa Clinic** was started in 1994 in collaboration with the V Street Mosque to serve members of the Muslim community. Volunteer physicians are needed to staff these clinics and teach the students primary care medicine. Further information on these clinics is at <http://cim.ucdavis.edu>.

The **Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)** was established three years ago as a national system of local, community-based volunteers - medical and public health professionals, as well as others without health backgrounds - who are identified, credentialed, trained and prepared in advance of an emergency. MRC members have responded locally, as well as to national disasters like the Katrina hurricane. When activated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, they work with agencies like the American Red Cross or substitute for medical professionals deployed to disaster areas. For information contact, Pamela Perdue, 916/875-0050

Project USA is designed to provide short term replacements for physicians in the Public Health Service in rural locations. These are not truly volunteer opportunities but locum tenens assignments for 2-4 weeks. Anyone interested in this activity can reach John Naughton at the American Medical Association, 800/388-4702.

There are 10 chapters of the **Flying Samaritans**, who fly to Baja Mexico in small aircraft one weekend each month to give free primary care to indigent persons. The Mother Lode Chapter operates out of the Sacramento area. They need nurses, physicians, dentists, pilots, translators, and support personnel. For more information, go to www.flyingsamaritans.org.

For those who like to travel outside the United States, many medical organizations will accept as few as two weeks of your time. The one I work with is **Health Volunteers Overseas**. Most assignments are for nurses, physicians, dentists - especially oral surgeons - and physical therapists, to teach in underdeveloped countries' hospitals. My wife and I have served in St Lucia and Peru and, by the time this is published, we will have volunteered in Cambodia.¹ There are programs in India, Bhutan, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and many other countries throughout the world. More information can be obtained from the HVO website at www.hvousing.org.

My wife, who always goes with me, works as a nurse or English teacher. We have met wonderful people who have introduced us to parts of their cultures we could never have experienced as tourists. We always come away feeling we have taken more than we have given. I have honed my physical diagnosis skills, especially in those countries where technology is not as advanced.

Consider not just one day "on" but anywhere from once a month to a full month's service. Once you have tried it, you will come away with the appreciation that you have, in a very small way, made a difference.

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1. Dr. Meyer finalized this article by email from Cambodia.

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