

SWOSU Group Provides Medical Needs to 322 in Panama

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Nineteen Southwestern Oklahoma State University students and faculty from the Division of Nursing and College of Pharmacy in Weatherford recently provided medical attention to 322 patients during a three-day period in Panama.

The SWOSU group was part of a Global Brigades mission trip organized during the university's spring break and was organized as a result of the outreach efforts of the SWOSU College of Pharmacy's Rural Health Network. The Global Brigades organization is the largest student-led global health and sustainable development organization in the world.

Santa Librada, Darien Province in Panama, has limited access to health care. Many patients that the SWOSU group treated benefited from vitamins and antibiotics as well as blood pressure, anthelmintic and diabetic medications that the team brought to Panama. The team left Panama residents with plenty of dental and hygiene education and supplies that will have long-term health benefits.

The SWOSU Medical Brigade included eight nursing students: Te'onna Adams, Sun City (CA); Bailey Bell, Weatherford; Meagen Harrel, Elk City; Katrina Holsaeter, Edmond; Micah Majors, Edmond; Katherine Maynard, Mustang; Bailey Spears, Amber; Mai Tran, Moore; and faculty member Juliana Bell, Bethany. Registered nurse, Sarah Purdon of Cordell of the Women's Department at Great Plains Regional Medical Center in Elk City also accompanied the group.

The six student pharmacists in the group included Samantha Caudle, Stillwater; Annette DeSantiago, Guymon; Tara Schultz, Weatherford; Kyrsten Smith, Ralston; David Truong, Moore; and Ryan Varghese, Mustang. Pharmacy faculty included Associate Dean Dr. David Ralph; Dr. Randy Curry, Coordinator of the College of Pharmacy Rural Health Network Dr. Randy Curry; and Introductory Pharmacy Practice Program Coordinator Dr. Nina Morris.

"My experience in Panama was a life changing event," Maynard said. "I went with the intention to help people and realized that I was changed in a way that cannot be explained in words. During this trip I was able to use my nursing skills and help to triage and take histories from patients as well as be a comfort to patients. I was able to learn how this different culture experiences health difficulties and how they eat, speak and interact."

The College of Pharmacy and School of Nursing express the deepest appreciation to the university, area churches and communities. Donations to the trip allowed SWOSU to take over \$5,000 in medications, dental supplies, hygiene packets and school supplies.

Curry said many students felt affirmation in their choice to pursue a medical degree after serving in Panama. Students were able to overcome language barriers, and they began to understand the level of compassion that comes with working with patients in third-world countries and at home.

The purpose of the mission trip was to allow students to become actively involved in a rural, medically underserved part of the world. The students came away from the experience with a greater appreciation for the challenges in delivering health care in rural areas, along with a greater understanding of the value that they can bring to the healthcare team. In addition, the experience was designed to foster the students' development of strong community service orientation as they begin their careers in the healthcare field.