

NEWS FROM:



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemakingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
La Grotto House, Glendarrach Rd, Rondebosch, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650-3733/2, Fax: +27 (0) 21 650-5682
Internet: www.uct.ac.za

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GrandWest/SHAWCO partnership boosts healthcare in Cape communities

More than 5000 residents of disadvantaged communities received free doctor consultations last year worth a total of R2 million, thanks to the partnership between GrandWest CSI and SHAWCO Health at the University of Cape Town.

SHAWCO (Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation) is a student-run, non-governmental organisation based at UCT. With donations by companies like GrandWest CSI, 800 medical and allied health science students travel in SHAWCO's mobile clinics to communities that do not have easy access to affordable healthcare. Under the supervision of more than 100 volunteer doctors, the students help diagnose patients' ailments and can advise them they should visit a provincial hospital for further treatment or evaluation.

SHAWCO Health co-ordinates six mobile clinics, which operate at night on a weekly basis in various Cape Town communities. The communities served by SHAWCO Health are:

Mondays:	Simthandile (in Khayalitsha) and (in Gugulethu) Newrest	18h00-23h00
Tuesdays:	Masiphumelele (in Noordhoek) and Brown's Farm (in Nyanga)	18h00-23h00
Wednesdays:	Joe Slovo (in Milnerton) and Zibonele (in Khayelitsha) Paediatric screening (different location each week)	18h00-23h00 Mornings
Every second Saturday:	Imizamo Yethu (in Hout Bay) and Du Noon Paediatric screening available (alternating between Imizamo Yethu and Du Noon)	Mornings Mornings

In addition, SHAWCO coordinates paediatric screenings every two weeks on Saturday mornings, alternating between Imizamo Yethu and Du Noon; and every Wednesday morning, alternating between the other communities. One of the doctors describes the SHAWCO paediatric screening where he volunteers as "one of the few places where so many children suffer from extreme cuteness".

At the SHAWCO clinics, medical students see patients under the supervision of a qualified volunteer doctor, who verifies diagnoses and provides advice. Clinical year (fourth- to sixth-year MBChB) students are responsible for clerking, examination, treatment and health promotional education of the patients; they also guide and teach pre-clinical students who observe and examine patients under guidance. In this way the clinics provide education and experience to future doctors and instil a passion for primary health care.

The students who volunteer for SHAWCO clinics say they are better prepared to deal with the challenges of their community service year and are more likely to stay on in South Africa afterwards. They also learn valuable lessons on the job. Final-year medical student Jonathan King recalled watching a junior colleague diagnosing a middle-aged woman who complained of vomiting and a hard mass in her abdomen. The student and patient both feared a tumour – but, as King explained: "They realised that being 45 years old doesn't mean these symptoms indicate you have a tumour." Instead, the patient was pregnant.

Another student volunteer, Kamlin Ekambaram, said: "It's truly an amazing feeling when, as a final-year medical student, patients who attend your SHAWCO clinic ask for you by name!"

Another student wrote on an anonymous survey form: "It has also opened me up to other peoples' worlds and backgrounds, which has taught me a lot about how different cultures perceive certain diseases. It has given me a lot of dimensions towards approaching certain disease and people in general."

SHAWCO provides a primary health care service, treating conditions such as diarrhoea, respiratory tract infections, sexually transmitted infections, muscular-skeletal ailments and other non-specialty disease; as well as services provided by physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, dietetics and audiology students. The SHAWCO pharmacy, operated by nurses with dispensing licences, supplies free primary healthcare medication to patients. Patients who require a higher level of care or who needs facilities not provided by SHAWCO are referred to the local day hospital or secondary hospital. Students work closely with community health workers in the community. These community health workers contribute to decisions made concerning the various clinics and help educate patients around specific health issues.

In the last three years, GrandWest CSI has donated a total of more than R4 million towards the outreaches provided by SHAWCO Health. This work is valued by UCT. In 2010 SHAWCO Health was shortlisted for the UCT Team of the Year Award; SHAWCO Health President Alison Powell received the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's Award for a student leader; and SHAWCO Health Vice-President Simon Mendelsohn received the UCT Student Leadership Award for the most outstanding student leader in community service at UCT.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Patricia Lucas

Tel: (021) 650 5428 Fax (021) 650 5628

Cell: 076 292 8047

E-mail: pat.lucas@uct.ac.za

La Grotto House, Glendarrach Road

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Website: www.uct.ac.za