

NEWS

Piedmont Gardens brings medical students, patients together



Medical student Asa Tapley confers with Piedmont Gardens volunteer resident Flossie Lewis.



By **LAURIE BOUCK**

PUBLISHED: March 24, 2011 at 12:31 PM PDT | UPDATED: August 15, 2016 at 3:12 PM PDT

Medical students are notoriously pressed for time. But a local medical program encourages students to slow down and get to know a rapidly-growing patient population: seniors.

Students participating in the University of California's Joint Medical Program have the chance to work with, and better understand, seniors at Oakland's Piedmont Gardens retirement community.

The Joint Medical Program is "a very successful program for training students who are interested in the patient as a whole, rather than in diabetes, or pneumonia, or lung cancer or such," said 11-year Piedmont Gardens resident Dr. Sid Spies, who supervises the students at Piedmont Gardens.

As part of their training, students learn to take histories and perform physicals on elderly patient volunteers at Piedmont Gardens.

"The young people love it because, for the only time in their lives, they can take three hours to take a history and do a limited physical," said Spies.

Each one of the 16 students accepted each year to the Joint Medical Program is also assigned an elderly mentor at Piedmont Gardens. The students meet with their mentors at least once each semester, spending half a day or more "just chatting," said Spies. This new mentor program lets the students "(get) a feel for old folks," he said.

"The goal is to break down stereotypes of old folks as doddering creatures who are just waiting for the end," said Spies. The mentorships are designed to last three years.

The Joint Medical Program helps medical students become more sensitive to elderly health concerns and learn the clinical skills needed to treat them, said second-year program student Asa Tapley. Because most doctors will work with elderly patients in their practices, "it's really important to know how to build a rapport and to deliver good care," he said.

The experience has also been “very humanizing,” said Tapley. He doesn’t just see a patient’s illness, but instead sees “a wonderful, well-read, retired teacher who happens to have a little Alzheimer’s.” “These people are not just their complicated health conditions,” he said.

The visits have other advantages for the medical students as well. “These are people that have amazing stories,” said Tapley, who studied history before entering medical school. “People who can tell me about pre-World War II years — it’s just incredible. I love going to Piedmont Gardens,” he said.

Piedmont Gardens residents also take pride in volunteering for the program. “They feel that they are helping the education of a young person,” said Spies. “They enjoy seeing them.”

The five-year Joint Medical Program lasts a year longer than a traditional medical school program. During the program, students earn both a M.S. and a M.D. Program students are admitted to UCSF but study at UC Berkeley for the first three years. Nursing students from Samuel Merritt University also work with Piedmont Gardens seniors in a separate program.

Start your day with us: Our top stories curated & delivered to your inbox each morning.

SIGN UP

By signing up, you agree to our [Terms of Use](#), [Privacy Policy](#), and to receive emails from East Bay Times.



[Report an error](#)
[Policies and Standards](#)
[Contact Us](#)

