



Health Mission Outreach

Inner city outreach changes the lives of patients and care providers

Since 2010, Dr. Pat Tavares (pictured above) has been on eight missions with Health Mission Outreach (HMO), a not for profit mobile clinic that reaches into disadvantaged communities of the Greater Toronto Area to provide essential health services to those who have the least access to them.

Tavares's involvement began in 2010 at the encouragement of her chiropractic health assistant, Luana Belo. Belo knew of the HMO through her dentist, Dr. Lun Hangfu. Though well established, the multidisciplinary group was still lacking a chiropractor, so Tavares jumped in.

"The HMO is a well oiled machine. Each patient has a single point of contact who guides that person through their appointments, ensuring that he or she gets the care that is needed in the most efficient manner. Each patient registers and is given a history sheet that each care provider reads and has input into. It's like shared electronic files, but on paper!"

Tavares notes that throughout her many missions with the HMO, she has been consistently impressed by how well managed it is.

"I let them know in advance how long I can stay, how many rooms I will need, and everything is always set up accordingly, down to the last electrical outlet."

An opportunity for CMCC interns

When Tavares began work as a clinician at CMCC's chiropractic clinic at Anishnawbe Health Toronto, she made an immediate connection between her work at HMO and the opportunity for her interns at Anishnawbe to gain clinical experience while serving an obvious need in the community.

"I've been on three missions with CMCC interns now," says Tavares. "With the interns, many more patients can be seen. It's good for everyone. Students see people with complex cases and get a breadth of experience that would take considerably longer in a standard clinic set up. Each patient is a new patient, requiring vitals and the normal intake examinations. Many haven't had health care in some time, so the service we provide them, ensuring that each patient receives all the care he or she needs, including referrals to MDs or other care providers, is vital."

A patient's point of view

Parin Kanji attended an HMO clinic in Brampton and was so impressed with the care she received, that she travelled to Mississauga for the next one. "It was a bit far for me to travel, but worth it. I was really happy with the way I was treated in Brampton so I came to Mississauga." Within the two visits, Kanji had dental



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Dr. Pat Tavares

Creating hope abroad

According to Dr. Lun Hangfu, organizer of the Toronto outreaches, the HMO is a collective of more than 500 volunteers who are focussed on giving back to those who are in need of their services. HMO, he says, began with a few volunteers working in the charitable sector who wanted a transparent, Canadian organization. It all began for him, he says, when he participated in an Amazon mission. “The experience made me cry, and we have returned each year since, with Canadian doctors and volunteers.” HMO was formed as an official charity in 2008 after two years of hard work securing funding for the portable equipment and tools. “The aim of HMO,” says Hangfu, “is to promote partnerships between health care professionals and those in need for mutual, unique experiences and to create hope.” He praised Tavares and the interns for donating their time and expertise and recognized Tavares for bringing renewed energy to the organization.

Aside from the HMO’s annual average of six missions to the Toronto area inner city neighbourhoods, the group goes as far abroad as the Amazon marshland in Paraguay, Africa, China and Brazil’s Favelas (slums), benefitting thousands of patients. ■

For more information on Health Mission Outreach, please visit www.hmocanada.org.

care, chiropractic care and acupuncture. “I have arthritis in my shoulder and back. Chiropractic treatment helps a great deal, but as a retired person, I don’t have extended health coverage and can’t easily afford it. It is the same with dental care. I don’t go as often as I should. At the HMO clinics, I was happy to access the services that I needed. It was a great experience and I will recommend it to others.”

In Mississauga, the chiropractic intern who treated Kanji found she had slightly elevated blood pressure and referred her to the onsite MD. At the end of the day, Kanji was able to leave the HMO clinic with reduced shoulder and back pain and with enough blood pressure medication to see her through until she was able to visit her own MD a few days later.

The intern’s perspective

Year IV intern Kathy Trenholm appreciated the high volume of patients she saw, and felt that the HMO was something she may want to be involved in during her own practice. She was also happy to hear that one of the patients from the outreach showed up at a CMCC clinic for follow up treatment.

Carl Danberg, an intern at the Anishawbe clinic, found the outreach gratifying and enriching, noting that it was extremely well organized and that he had the opportunity to work alongside other health professionals.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Helen Keller
Author, political activist

