

Midwestern Mobile Clinic Serves Pets and People on Reservations

Veterinary students bring care to dogs and cats while helping build and support humane communities

by Rachael Kreisler, VMD MSCE, Assistant Professor of Shelter Medicine, rkreis@midwestern.edu



Camping on the floor of a gymnasium may have limited appeal, but Midwestern's veterinary students eagerly do so for the opportunity to work with the animals and people of First Nations. For the past year, the Midwestern College of Veterinary Medicine's mobile clinic visited at least

one Native American reservation local to Arizona each month, bringing basic preventive medicine to communities facing significant animal care challenges.

Student volunteers, closely overseen by Midwestern's shelter medicine faculty, provide care to dogs and cats that includes spay/neuter surgeries, vaccines, examinations and minor medical care. Student volunteers and faculty performed more than 500 spay/neuter surgeries and over 600 vaccine/exams during 22 mobile clinic visits to the reservations. Heather Cornell, class of 2018 and past president of the Midwestern University Student Chapter of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (MUSCASV), summarizes students' feelings about mobile clinic trips to the reservations. "The animals we serve on reservations may otherwise not have access to veterinary care due to financial or transportation constraints. It feels rewarding to take our mobile clinic into these underserved communities and provide basic medical care and surgical procedures for the pets."

Midwestern's shelter medicine program works closely with a local partner in each community to provide outreach and ensure that services reach tribal members who face the greatest challenge to care. These partners include tribal animal

control, offices of environmental health, Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS) and the Nagi Foundation. Sheila Iyengar of Nagi states "Midwestern's partnership has made a tremendous impact in the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. The students' time and dedication with every family reflects their care for the animals and pet owners." Reservations include Chemehuevi, San Carlos, Hopi, Pascua Yaqui and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

The mobile clinic's goals include student education through hands-on learning, service to the community, improvement of animal welfare and introduction of students to an underserved population that, by definition, they would be unlikely to see as practicing veterinarians. Students are exposed to a variety of medical conditions, many of which they might commonly see in future practice (demodex) and some of which they might not (transmissible venereal tumor). Mobile clinics are popular with students, with more than 70 percent of second and third year veterinary students having volunteered for at least one

event. First year veterinary students' participation has reached 50 percent. Students who volunteer attend an average of three times.

Kaitlyn Vorherr, class of 2019, has volunteered in the mobile clinic 17 times. She states "the mobile clinic offers irreplaceable hands-on experience. The love and appreciation that comes from the clients that we assist is truly rewarding and reminds me of why I wanted to be a veterinarian." Abigail Rife, class of 2018, has volunteered 19 times and declares "I can see what our services do for the health of the animals as well as the strength of the relationship they have with their owners. This experience has helped me to grow as a professional and a person." "Coming from an underserved community myself, I cherish opportunities to give back," states Christian Mendez, class of 2020 and current president of MUSCASV.

In addition to providing veterinary service, students participate in testing, with owner's consent, for animal disease prevalence. Future efforts will include participation in epidemiologic disease surveillance with local health officers, as well as educational outreach. In the third week of January, veterinary student education coordinators from Midwestern's interdisciplinary health services program (HOME) will accompany the mobile clinic to facilitate animal health educational presentations with school children from the San Carlos reservation. Education coordinator Cortney Stablein, class of 2018, points out "we hope to connect with children in fostering the development of a compassionate community that values respect and humane treatment of animals."

The mobile clinic's work is generously supported by PetSmart Charities and Partnerships with Native Americans.

