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SHDA Raises Cultural Awareness

Written by Adam Zewe

With the U.S. Hispanic population expected to triple by 2050, the Student Hispanic Dental Association works with a sense of urgency. The SHDA raises awareness of the Hispanic population's oral health care needs.

Recruitment of Hispanic dental students is vital, explains President Halima Karim, DDS '12. Hispanics are the second largest minority group in Maryland, yet they remain underrepresented in the dental field. As the Hispanic population grows, access to care will become a critical issue. "We train students to treat Hispanic patients, even if it means teaching them to speak a few words of Spanish. A little bit can go a really long way," she explains. The SHDA hosts seminars where students learn Spanish translations of basic dental terms.

Many students studied Spanish in high school, but can't speak fluently enough to communicate with patients, says Vice President Jennifer Raad, DDS '14. The association encourages students to practice Spanish in the clinic to reinforce their understanding. Most SHDA members are not Hispanic, making language drills even more important. "It's our job to understand the culture and the language so we can connect to the Hispanic population and provide better patient care," Raad states.

SHDA participants serve the Hispanic community at outreach events throughout Maryland. They distribute oral health brochures and provide dental tips and demonstrations in Spanish. Many Hispanic families don't have access to toothbrushes or basic dental care. "At the end of the day, when I see how many people we reach, I feel like we've made a big difference," says Secretary Christina Samra, DDS '12.

The SHDA has been a lifesaver for Treasurer Diana Shoe, who moved to Maryland from Peru six years ago. Language remains her biggest obstacle, she says. Shoe, DDS '12, spends extra time taking tests because she must translate questions into Spanish. That extra work creates additional stress, but the support of SHDA members is invaluable, she concludes.

More Information

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