

## LMU Social Work Students Gain Experience Through Remote Area Medical Services

Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) hosts Remote Area Medical (RAM) every year to provide free medical, dental, vision, and veterinary services to individuals in the Appalachian region. This effort provides services to thousands of people who often wait hours, even throughout the night, to stand in line for care. For some, RAM is their only source of medical care and, thus, they wait to address medical needs until RAM returns the following year.

LMU, RAM and community leaders work together for months to prepare for RAM. The Department of Social Work (DSW) has been involved in this process since the second LMU RAM in Fall 2006. I, representing the DSW, participate on LMU's RAM planning committee. Through the leadership of the Dean of Allied Health Sciences, I have worked specifically with the Veterinary Technology Program to plan the free spay/neuter clinic offered during RAM.

This role has led to the opportunity for social work students to engage in veterinary social work during RAM. Hence, RAM serves as an extension of the classroom where social work students test new social work skills while helping others in need. Students are able to observe my work as a professional social worker. A community social worker also volunteers for the RAM VET Clinic. She further engages in service provision, student supervision and mentorship.

By the end, students are able to collect information from pet owners upon arrival for registration, provide emotional support to pet owners and pets, and assist in the discharge process with referrals for low-cost veterinary care for follow-up. Students are also able to observe how to handle crisis situations in response to pet emergencies and/or pet owner conflict. These social work student volunteers have made a significant difference in the lives of pets and their owners.

Their impact has revealed the need for social work students to expand services to assist people who seek medical services through RAM. After receiving medical services, a person might be newly diagnosed with a disease and have no one with the training or time available to provide emotional support. These people may feel overwhelmed by their need to arrange follow-up care given a lack of financial resources, transportation, or knowledge of the health care system.

Therefore, the future is full of opportunities to grow with and through LMU RAM as a social work student. This progress requires continued collaboration with LMU, RAM, and community leaders charged with planning RAM so they better understand what social workers can offer across the continuum of care. It is amazing what social workers can do to help people seeking RAM services. However, we need students who are willing to volunteer to help make access to social work services possible.

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