



Serving the Community: Experience Establishing an Orthopaedic Clinic for Underserved Patients

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Exposure to a wide variety of pathology and a diverse patient population is essential in any medical training program. In the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania, we are fortunate to have access to both. However, there is still a large population of underserved patients in the surrounding area who do not have access to routine medical care; these patients often present to our Emergency Department (ED) where it can be challenging to find a reliable and expedited way for them to obtain the necessary follow-up and care. In addition, there are patients who are referred for non-urgent orthopaedic evaluation and for multiple reasons are not able to establish care. Seeing this need, orthopaedic surgery residents from the class of 2021 established a clinic where those in need of orthopaedic care could be evaluated and directed to the appropriate channels for care.

In 2016, Dr. Jon Morris, a general surgery attending at Penn, along with a group of residents launched the Center for Surgical Health (CSH) to help vulnerable patient populations in Philadelphia gain access to surgical care. One of the community centers CSH works with is Puentes de Salud (Puentes), which provides primary and specialty care to the Latino immigrant population in South Philadelphia. Several surgical specialties had already established clinics in this setting, and this is where Penn's Orthopaedic Surgery Department joined in the efforts to support vulnerable communities in our area.

In the Fall of 2020, Penn's Department of Orthopaedic Surgery began to have monthly clinics. Through these clinics, residents had a chance to evaluate patients under the supervision of an attending and develop an individualized treatment plan. To this date, 30 patients have been evaluated at the orthopaedic surgery clinic at Puentes, and 13 have undergone surgical intervention, while the remaining patients

have either been treated non-operatively with appropriate follow-up or are in the process of applying for emergency medical assistance (EMA).

It is worth mentioning that none of this is possible without a strong support team. Puentes and CSH are supported by an incredible group of medical students that serve as personal patient navigators (PPNs) and assist in various tasks from helping patients apply for EMA to accompanying patients to their medical appointments and surgeries. In addition, an integral part of the success of this program has been our faculty's unwavering support in helping us care for these patients.

Our experience at Puentes has helped us hone many of our skills including physical exams, identifying surgical indications, and developing treatment plans. We have been fortunate to be exposed to the complex social needs that are sometimes required to get patients the care they need. This may range from coordinating childcare and transport so patients can attend appointments, to providing translators to help patients with paperwork. The clinic at Puentes de Salud has also become a way for the orthopaedic department to provide follow-up for the uninsured patients who we have seen in the ED. In addition, we further develop our teaching skills by interacting with the medical students that serve as PPNS while we evaluate the patients.

The most important aspect has been gaining the trust of a new patient population, who we hope to serve for years to come. Future directions include expanding the number of patients we reach at Puentes and establishing similar free clinic models in other communities in Philadelphia.

We are grateful for the support of the Penn community and the orthopaedic surgery leadership in establishing and maintaining this clinic.