Alpert medical students dispel fears at Teddy Bear Clinic

DEBBIE M. FRIEDMAN

Adam Driesman MD'16 shows a young student how to listen to a heartbeat.

For three years now, Alpert Medical School students have been educating Providence's youth and their parents about health and medicine through an event called The Teddy Bear Clinic. This year's clinic was held in November at the Providence Children's Museum, where more than 100 children were given teddy bears and wended their way through the clinic's various stations. They learned everything from good nutrition to how to listen to their heartbeats, and practiced on their donated teddy bears – which they kept to accompany them on future doctor's visits.

This year's clinic co-organizer, **NAN DU MD'16**, believes the clinic not only educates children, but also helps to ease their anxiety about visiting the doctor. "We think it is incredibly important for children to be comfortable with physicians and to understand why they go to the doctor's office each year."

But the kids aren't the only ones who benefit from the clinic. Medical students learn to communicate complex ideas in simple ways for their young audiences to understand. And families receive important medical information while their children run around in the "fitness" station and play OPERATION in the "surgery" station.

In an interview with RIMJ, Du and fellow volunteers **STEPHANIE LEE MD'16** and **JUAN PABLO ZHENLIO MD'16** talked about the origins of the clinic and the "Teddy Bear" factor in their "clinical" interactions with the children.

How did the clinics begin?

Nan Du: The idea actually originated from a Brown medical student, **STEPHANIE LE '10 MD'14** who was inspired by the "Teddyklinik" – the German clinic – after she visited Germany on an Alpert Medical School exchange program. She spearheaded the idea and established the first Teddy Bear Clinic here in 2011.

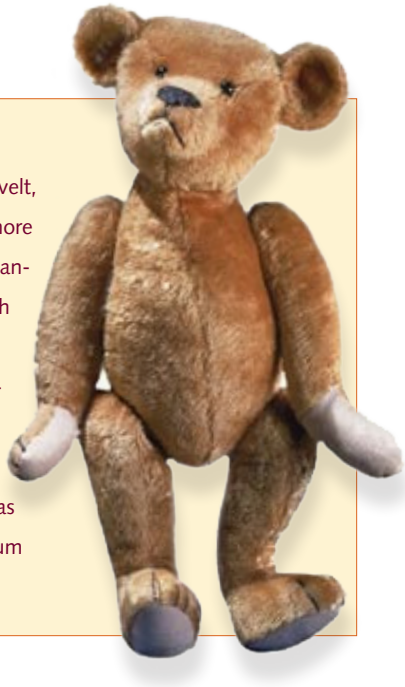
What are the goals of the clinic?

Nan Du: It aims to reach out and teach young children from Providence about going to the doctor and about certain aspects of health, such as oral hygiene, nutrition, and immunizations. The children bring their teddy bears (or are provided one at the event) to learn about the routine components of a doctor's visit, with some chances to practice these skills on their teddy bears. For instance, at the "heart and lungs" station, children are taught about the cardiac rhythm. From there, they attempt to listen to the teddy bear's heart and then listen to their own.

In immunizations, we teach the children about the importance of shots and why we get them every year. Furthermore, at the end the students give a "shot" to their teddy bear. The shot is just a syringe filled with water. At another station, we demonstrate wound healing and casting by putting ACE bandages on teddy bears and explaining various x-rays. There is also information

First Teddy Bear

Teddy Bears, named after President Theodore Roosevelt, have been comforting and enchanting children for more than a century. The first Teddy in this country was manufactured in Brooklyn, NY, in 1903, by Russian Jewish immigrants Morris Michtom and his wife, Rose. The plush toy became wildly popular and soon the Michtom's candy story morphed into an enterprise called the Ideal Toy Company. This Teddy was presented to Kermit Roosevelt, the president's son, when he was a boy and is now at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.



SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

available for parents and students about dental care, nutrition, health insurance, and other health issues.

What is the most rewarding thing that comes from doing the clinics?

Stephanie Lee: I still remember what it was like as a child to visit the doctors, whether it was for something as simple as an annual check-up, or more serious, a surgery. I did not like it when these big people in white coats invaded my personal space for the physical exam, and especially when they stuck me with painful needles. I just didn't understand what they were doing or why. Now, as I crossover into the role of that "scary" doctor, I want to help kids become more comfortable during a doctor's visit by taking the time to show and explain things in a more friendly environment at the Teddy Bear Clinic. It is amazing to see the change from hesitation to eagerness to learning when kids are given the opportunity to participate in the various health-related stations with their new friends – their teddy bears.

Juan Pablo Zhenlio: One moment will always stand out for me. There was a little girl who hid behind her mother's legs – too afraid to approach the other group of kids at our "wound healing" station. I approached her with a teddy bear and asked if she wanted to join us to learn how to put on a band-aid. She remained too nervous and shy to come over but accepted my offer of a teddy. I returned to the station and after a while, many of the kids left and moved on to the next station. As soon as our table emptied, the little girl came up to me, grasping her teddy tightly, and said that she and her new friend were ready to play. She was so enthusiastic about taking care of her teddy's booboos that within a few minutes she had covered its entire arm with Disney Princess band-aids.

From left, Olivia Linden MD'16, Stephanie Lee MD'16 and Patrick Lec MD'16 were "on call" at the "surgery station," using the game OPERATION as a learning tool.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALPERT MEDICAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

Alpert Medical School students organized a Teddy Bear Clinic for Providence elementary school children on November 15, 2013 at the Providence Children's Museum. Participating were: *[Front row, from left]* Emily Davis MD'17, Jenna Kahn MD'16, co-organizer Nan Du MD'16, Alissa Cooper MD'17, Kelly Fitzgerald MD'17, Nery Moises Porras MD'17, Natasha Kumar MD'17, Holly Brindeau MD'17, Sanchita Singal MD'17, Stephanie Lee MD'16, Emily Shelkowitz MD'16, Nicole Noronha MD'16. *[Back row, from left]* Rachel Sargent MD'17, Eduardo Garza MD'17, Joseph Carnevale MD'17, David Lee MD'16, Juan Pablo Zhenlio MD'16, Olivia Linden MD'16, Brian Joo MD'16, Patrick Lec MD'16, Andrew Katz MD'17.

What are the children most anxious about?

Nan Du: Most of the children tend to fear the immunization table and we will have to coax them over to the station and explain why it is important. At the recent clinic, one of the parents told me that after their child attended our last Teddy Bear Clinic, their daughter had declared that she wanted to be a doctor in the future. Every child's experience will be different but the general consensus we feel at the end of the clinic is that the children are more curious about medicine, and a bit more accepting to individuals who carry a stethoscope. ❖

Author

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