



COLLEGE / INTERNS

## Seattle Institute of East Asian Medicine: Helping the Homeless Community

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At the Seattle Institute of East Asian Medicine (SIEAM, formerly SIOM), the quality of the clinical education relies on a commitment to having students in clinic with experienced practitioners from the first week of the program and providing varied clinical training, including working at offsite clinics. These offsite clinics give our students an opportunity to get out into the community and broaden their perspective on being a healthcare professional as they provide valuable healthcare services to people in need.

### The Off-Site Clinics

SIEAM currently offers two main offsite clinics. The first is ACRS: The Asian Counseling and Referral Service, an organization which promotes social justice and the well-being and empowerment of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other underserved communities through community-based multilingual and multicultural services.

SIEAM and faculty member Sachiko Nakano, have been providing low-cost treatments at ACRS to immigrants primarily from the Pacific Rim, for more than 10 years. Treatments often involve the supervisor, a student intern, and an interpreter, since many of the patients do not speak English.

The second is Evergreen Treatment Services (ETS), which has been transforming the lives of individuals through innovative and effective addiction and social services in Western Washington since 1973. At their three community clinics ETS offers medication assisted treatment, including medication, medical monitoring, counseling, and drug screens for adults with opioid use disorders. They also support the REACH team which provides street-based, case management and outreach services to adults living outside in the greater Seattle area.

The ETS-SIEAM partnership has been in place for more than 20 years. In the Seattle location, student interns work in a community clinic setting, performing the NADA protocol on patients dealing with drug and alcohol dependency issues. Students and patients are deeply affected by treatments in these settings and the impact on both communities was made clear last year when student Diane Atkinson chose her Capstone Project.



### 3rd Year Capstone Project

According to Diane, "When I entered SIEAM, one of the things I was most excited about was the third-year (Capstone) project. I would have the freedom to pursue any topic that interested me—narrow or broad, specific or comprehensive. I knew I wanted to create something that would be directly useful for patients. During a presentation in our public health course, a member of Acupuncturists Without Borders (AWB) mentioned that ear beads were just as effective as needles on the NADA protocol points. I thought...is that really true?"

Over the next few months, Diane treated patients enrolled in the methadone program at ETS to complete her NADA certification. When it came time to select a final project, Diane decided to test the effectiveness of ear beads in a public health setting.

She proposed a six-week pilot project to Mary's Place, an established organization with a strong track record for helping homeless women and families. Originally founded in 1999 as a day center for homeless women, Mary's Place has seven overnight shelters serving more than 600 women and families each night and works to provide shelter, nourishment, resources, healing and hope in a safe community.

## Diane's Clinical Trial

In June 2017, Diane opened a free, weekly stress reduction clinic using auricular acupressure on the NADA points at the Mary's Place day center in downtown Seattle. Although only a handful of people initially showed up, by the end of the trial period, demand and interest had grown to the point where Mary's Place decided to continue the clinic indefinitely. Working with the volunteer coordinator and director of Mary's Place in conjunction with the clinic director and president of SIEAM, an ongoing clinic was established that is run with the assistance of SIEAM student interns.

Clinic is held on Friday mornings for two hours. About 20 women participate each week and over 120 women have been treated since the clinic's inception. There is a steady stream of regulars, along with 5-7 new patients each week. A diverse population of women are treated, including a large number with untreated alcohol, drug and mental health issues. Staff members are also offered treatment to support their health and work, in what can be a challenging environment.

It took time to build trust. Some women waited several weeks or months to try a treatment. Now, the regulars have spread the word throughout the community, telling their friends how the treatments help them. With her doctor's support, one woman was able to discontinue anti-depressants after a few months with ear beads. Another woman has stopped smoking. Another who was struggling with a mood disorder, stated one week after her first treatment that she was calm and felt normal for the first time in a long time.

## The Clinical Results

Diane reports , "Every week, several women simply tell me *it helps*. A patient came almost every week for the first four months. She didn't speak to me for several weeks and usually sat by herself with her head in her hands. One day, she opened up and told me that she was finally sleeping better in the shelter. Later, I realized I hadn't seen her for several weeks. When I did, she told me she had gotten housing. She was open, laughing, telling me stories about her childhood and plans for her future. Improved sleep was an important part of helping her get back on her feet. Through this simple, yet very powerful treatment, we are making a difference in the lives of these women."

Even though her clinic is small, the impact is significant and growing. I am thrilled that this new clinic grew out a pilot project started by one of SIEAM's third-year students! Diane's work and the development of this new clinic capture the spirit of SIEAM, whose mission is to train compassionate and effective practitioners of East Asian medicine who can function independently and collaboratively in patient-centered care. As a graduate of SIEAM and an effective and independent practitioner, Diane Atkinson is making a difference in the lives of people in need.

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