Dis ——Week 7

Topic: **Geriatric Clinic**

I visited a geriatric community clinic attached to the Los Angeles Jewish Home with some of our classmates. The clinic provides primary and specialty medical care to seniors. We received a warm welcome from the faculty, and they had prepared a professional arrangement for us; moreover, they constantly adapted to our needs. Though we had visited the clinic before, our recent trip provided our first opportunity to talk closely with the faculty, allowing all of us to learn much from this visit. We began by speaking with a nurse practitioner and two physicians in a conference room, and each conversation lasted about 20 minutes. Afterward, we followed the manager and visited the whole clinic.

 During our tour with the faculty, I learned several new ideas. First, American people do not value seniors and regard them as useless. Second, almost all of the residents living in long-term care are white people—other ethnicities, such as Latinos, usually take care of their elderly family members. Third, America’s medical system has different levels of care: hospitals, residential care, nursing homes, and clinics. Hospitals deal with emergencies. Nursing homes provide 24-hour care to frail people (including primary care), execute diagnoses, and dispense medications. Fourth, in regard to payment systems, Medicaid and tax support for long-term care and insurance go to the clinics.

The geriatric community clinic of the Los Angeles Jewish Home provides medical care to residents, aiming to keep them in exceptional health. Most of the patients are residents of the home; the organization, however, plans to extend its services to the community clinic to serve outside patients. Two main groups handle the clinic’s caring. One is a group of full-time physicians employed by the home, including four physicians and two nurse practitioners. The other group comprises the outside physicians, who routinely visit the patients living in the home.

The two physicians we met, Dr. A and Dr. B, both seemed tired but enthusiastic. According to them, being a geriatrician is challenging for several reasons. First, most of their patients are old seniors; in the geriatric clinic of the home, most patients are over 90 years old. They are frail and have weak immune systems, requiring substantial amounts of medicine. Moreover, they often have complicated health conditions; sometimes they even have multiple diseases. Second, this field lacks adequate research. Third, while treating senior patients, geriatrics must be extra meticulous because patients’ histories and other details must be checked carefully. However, Dr. A and Dr. B appreciate their jobs and the overall experience provided by this clinic. Dr. A used to work in public health, research, and administration, but never for more than two years in each setting; however, she has worked in the home for more than 16 years. Helping people to live longer while keeping them functional provides her a sense of meaning and happiness. Not many people like to work with the elderly, but Dr. B appreciates her job and feels comfortable with seniors. The residents in the home might be old and frail, but most are active and fun. The only thing Dr. B finds hard is the talking to family members.

The greatest part of our visit was the conversation shared with Ms. G, the manager. Her appealing smile radiated infectious enthusiasm. She has worked in the clinic for more than 15years—she obviously loves her job very much. She used to be a nurse at UCLA. She began to work for the clinic as a nurse; later, she was promoted and became the manager. When sharing her successful experience as a manager, she emphasized the importance of teamwork and of knowing which people were best suited to particular tasks. She focuses her leadership on making her subordinates feel happy. She impressed me the most when she said, “Everyone here is happy. If you are not, we will make you feel happy.”

People like the home because it is unique and well equipped: It has an examination room, rehab center, dentistry, ophthalmology, and beauty salon. The home also provides a relatively open and positive work environment for the staff. Also, the home takes care of its employees by providing stress-relieving classes and activities, such as fitness classes, healthy eating classes, and some entertainment services.

 In the end, Ms. G suggested that salaries are important—but not everything; rather, an individual should focus on finding a job that he or she truly enjoys. For her, when a patient returns to say thank you, she feels warm and rewarded on a deeper level. In addition to teamwork, being a successful leader or manager requires many other skills, such as communication expertise or competence in handling customer-service interactions. She expressed her wish that more students would learn to become excellent geriatricians; in her opinion, a greater number of skilled individuals are needed to help expand and develop this field.