

MOBILE HEALTH VANS CARE FOR ALAMEDA'S HOMELESS by Alvin Tran

As part of the 2012 Health Media Internship, I was encouraged to explore how mobile health vans were operating in the San Francisco Bay Area. After weeks of email exchanges, I was finally able to schedule a visit with the Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless Program. The program has its own mobile health van operation and visits various areas of Alameda County including Oakland and Berkeley, California. The van primarily serves the county's homeless population.

When visited the health van, I originally thought that I would be writing about the van's patient population and how the Supreme Court's decision on the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act would affect the van's current operation. As I observed the health care providers on board the van, I saw them treating patients for acute conditions like allergies and infections. However, many of these patients also had mental illnesses which I later learned could not be treated on the van or at many health care facilities in Alameda County. I also learned about patients with less severe cases of mental illnesses such as depression. These patients are called the "Walking Wounded" because they are homeless and go on living their lives untreated. As a former public health student, I was fascinated by the mobile van's high number of mentally ill patients and chose to pursue it as a story.

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<http://blogs.kqed.org/stateofhealth/2012/08/01/mobile-health-vans-care-for-alamedas-homeless/>