Needy get medical help, thanks to UP student outreach day

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THE SEDIBA Hope Medical Centre was a hive of activity on Saturday as medical students and practitioners checked vitals, did general examinations, gave dental advice and offered HIV counselling and testing to close to 300 of Pretoria’s needy – for free.

Inside the centre were stations where parents and children had their blood pressure, cholesterol and sugar levels checked.

Teeth were also checked and toothbrushes handed out, while three mobile clinics were set up for HIV testing and counselling.

“We’ve had 86 people tested and will be following up on those who tested positive to ensure they get treatment,” said a nurse manning the Foundation for Professional Development Clinics.

The foundation joined Sediba for the community outreach day. The main targets were the inner-city homeless and destitute, and those who had difficulty in accessing health care.

But the event also attracted residents who did not want to pass up a chance to get free medical attention, minus queues and fussy clinic staff. “I brought my four children, and on top of being seen by the doctors they have also played on the jumping castle and had sweets, juice and toys,” said Fortunate Mbasera from Pretoria West.

Children were given goodie bags to take home, one with much-needed crayons that Mbasera’s 7-year-old needed for school.

There were also face painting artists, books and crayons, puzzles and other educational toys.

Third-, fourth-, fifth- and sixth-year medical students from the University of Pretoria’s Curtizia medical residence were at the centre of activities as part of the community day. As friends of Doctors Without Borders (MSF), they chose Sediba to offer free treatment. “We encouraged the students to bring their children, treats, clothing and toys,” said student group president Jackie Webb.

Patients were also treated to hot dogs, coffee, tea, and fruits.

“They brought a holistic package,” centre co-ordinator Wayne Helfrich said.

The students also brought with them practising doctors, friends of MSF, who saw the more serious cases and referred them to the Tshwane District Hospital.

“The opportunity to make a difference to those who feel it the most brings so much pleasure,” internal medicine registrar Dr Kabelo Kgosietsile said.

Educational slides covering a variety of health topics were shown and a gym was donated, which Helfrich said, would be placed at one of the teenagers’ homes. Face cloths, towels and soap were also available for those who required them, and they were allowed use of the centre’s showers. Some went away with new clothes.

“We need more of these outreach activities, because through them our faith in humanity is restored,” said Mbasera.