Bringing health care to the world

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, a Santa Barbara nonprofit is working to provide access to health care for vulnerable communities all over the world.

The organization, World Telehealth Initiative, is enabling doctors to help patients anywhere in the world without having to travel.

The WTI sees a major need for improvement. As of now, the World Health Organization states that half of the planet’s population does not have access to essential health services and that around 40 percent of countries have fewer than 10 doctors per 10,000 people. In contrast, according to the WTI, the U.S. doctor to patient ratio is approximately one to 380 people.

The world’s lesser doctor-to-patient ratio has left a deep impact. The lack of health care has led to 8.6 million treatable deaths each year, according to the WTI.

The WTI was founded in 2017 with the help of its partner at a Santa Barbara telemedicine company, InTouch Health. Since then, the WTI has provided care for 21 developing communities around the world by using InTouch Health’s innovative global cloud-based network, which allows volunteer physicians to provide care anywhere in the world from any location.

According to the WTI’s news release, “WTI’s telehealth technology is compatible with any medical specialty, including neurology, cardiology, infectious disease, pediatrics, orthopedics and more. The model is much more sustainable than traditional health care methods, such as medical missions (flying a doctor to a location) and video conferencing (a doctor using a potentially unreliable internet connection). Medical professionals are eager to volunteer their time and services, and WTI allows them to do so from their home or office, eliminating the typical barriers of travel, cost and safety.”

The World Telehealth Initiative has highlighted the effectiveness of InTouch Health’s telehealth capabilities by continuing to provide quality care around the world amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The need for what we do has never been greater. As you may have heard, telehealth has proven to be a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19,” said Sharon Allen, co-founder and executive director of World Telehealth Initiative in a statement.

“IT keeps providers safe while enabling them to care for patients,” she said. “It allows infectious disease specialists, pulmonologists and epidemiologists to support any clinic or hospital anywhere in the world. We are helping our partners in less resourced settings establish isolation wards, get donated ventilators on line, train on acute respiratory distress, provide patient care, etc.”

Ms. Allen told the News-Press that when the organization first heard about the possibility of a global pandemic, “we immediately reached out to our partners and asked how we can help them and what they needed from us.”

After finding out the needs of their international partners, Ms. Allen said with global resources spread thin due to COVID, there was a concern whether there would be a shortage of volunteer physicians to “help with the mission.” She explained the WTI feared it would lose the progress made before COVID-19.

However, Ms. Allen said their volunteer physicians “didn’t skip a beat” and that it was inspiring to see how “philanthropic our physicians are and how much they wanted to help.”

An expectant mother awaits safe delivery at Area 25 hospital in Malawi. This hospital is one of only a few places in the eastern African nation that provide C-sections for obstructed labors. The World Telehealth Initiative is working to improve healthcare access around the world.
The WTI has helped many of its international community programs prepare for and monitor COVID-19 in a number of ways. So far, the WTI has provided patient care, helped develop intensive care units and used its large warehouse of critical ventilators needed to fight this pandemic.

In addition, Ms. Allen told the News-Press that the WTI has also been able to use its relationships with infectious disease experts to connect their hospitals with “doctors that were on the frontlines” fighting COVID.

“It’s been very exciting to see the successes during a time like this,” she said. “There are just so many options with telehealth to connect patients with the providers that they need!”

Ms. Allen said that the WTI will continue to provide care around the world, no matter the circumstances and has plans to expand from 35 to 40 programs within the next two years.

In addition, Dr. Yulun Wang, InTouch Health’s chairman, founder and chief innovation officer, told the News-Press that while InTouch Health goes forward with its recent merger with Telerothel, the WTI will gain additional funding as part of Telerothel’s Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative Platform.

“I am very excited about that because it will be giving it additional life,” Dr. Wang said.

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**Fix of the Week**

**S** tarting off as a large yellow blooming flower on the plant, the blossoms turn into broad green leaves extending towards the sun’s rays. Once these leaves begin to appear at the base of most of the flowers present, squash develops slowly, and it is checked daily as one waits in anticipation for the harvest. Finally, the first of the squash is ready to be picked, with many more on the plant following close behind.

There are a number of stages that fresh summer squash can be harvested, starting with the flower itself, or the flower with a small squash less than half the size of a standard squash.

With both male and female flowers located on a single plant, it is the male flowers that tend to be more regularly harvested for culinary blossoms. Male flowers, too, have small, male flowers that never transform into summer squash like the female flowers. They also tend to be more open and broad, easier to work with in the kitchen.

Advised by high and home food enthusiasts, fresh squash blossoms find its way on an annual basis onto the menu sheet, the seasonal treat. One of my favorite ways to enjoy them is to stuff them with goat cheese and give them a quick coat of panico bread crumbs and fry. The end result is crispy, creamy delicious.

**Fried Goat Cheese Squash Blossoms**

1 bunch or basket squash blossoms, about 8-10
4 ounces soft goat cheese cheese (I used a gable herb flavor. Can also incorporate your own fresh herbs, finely chopped)
1 cup flour
2 large eggs beaten
1/2 cup paleo bread crumbs
1 teaspoon seasoned salt
Peanut oil

Add a couple spoons of goat cheese into each squash blossom. Place the petals together and twist the top to seal closed. Add flour, egg and bread crumbs in a separate bowl. Mix seasoned salt with bread crumbs.

Add oil to a wide shallow pan, just enough to cover about a quarter inch layer and turn to medium-high heat. Dip each stuffed blossom in flour, then egg, then bread crumb. Fry each blossom in a single layer in the pan, about 2 minutes per side or until crispy. Transfer to a paper towel to remove excess oil before serving.

Yield: Makes about 8-10 blossoms

**Picks of the Week**

**Squash blossoms**

Traditionally used in Mexican cuisine for quesadillas, they can also be enjoyed raw or lightly sautéed in a bit of olive oil. Currently available at all weekly Santa Barbara Certified farmers markets for a number of local producers. Price averages $5 per bunch or basket.

**Black splendor plum**

Grown in Tulare County by Bald Hill Farms, this new seasonal find will be available for a limited time at the weekly Santa Barbara certified farmers markets. Price is $3.00 per pound or $4 per basket.

**Purple majesty potatoes**

Certified organic, purple market potatoes are grown by Jacob-Grant of Roots Farm. They can be found at the weekly Saturday Santa Barbara, Tuesday Santa Barbara and Wednesday Solvang farmers markets. Price is $2.50 per pound.

Sue Keefer is general manager of the Santa Barbara Certified Farmers Market Association and host of “From the Field,” which airs live 8-9 a.m. Thursdays on KCRW 89.9 FM and online at KCRW.org.