



IN THE SPOTLIGHT



A Dream Team: APLA Health & Wellness' medical and dental providers talk about their work, their inspiration, and their commitment to the community

Steven Vitero, DDS Medical Director, Dental Services

Steven Vitero joined what was then known as APLA Dental Services in July 2004. Now, as the medical director, dental services, for APLA Health & Wellness, he is responsible for the management of staff and all day-to-day operations of our three dental clinics, as well as our mobile dental van.

How did you start working with APLA and why?

It was my pure good fortune! I was treating patients in my private dental practice four days a week and on the fifth day working in a community clinic. Looking back, I realize I was growing tired of the daily grind of private practice and that I looked forward to that fifth day where I could treat patients at the clinic. Eventually, I saw that a position was open with APLA. I applied, was hired, and started working here on July 7, 2004! The personal rewards I received by improving the well-being of folks who could not afford treatment or were otherwise uncomfortable being treated by judgmental practitioners were remarkable. I was instantly gratified and given a new lease on life. It's now been 11 years, and I feel so blessed to have a career that brings me so much joy and satisfaction.

How have the dental services we provide changed with the evolution of APLA Health & Wellness?

Many changes continue to take place as we evolve. Of course, the most significant change is opening our doors to the HIV-negative population for the first time. We had grown very protective of our HIV-positive population over the years as we are considered a "safe haven" for people living with AIDS since the 1980s. Dental services may change slightly due to the ever-changing rules of our funding sources, but the commitment to providing comprehensive, first-class, highly professional dental treatment remains unchanged.

What do you think is most important for people to know about the dental services APLA Health & Wellness provides?

As a dental patient at APLA Health & Wellness, a client will be treated by a professional who truly cares. The group we have assembled consists of kind-hearted, considerate, gentle, technically sound professionals who were selected as much for their ability to make a patient comfortable as for their ability to produce excellent dentistry.

What is one of the highlights from your time working here?

My favorite story to share is about our development as a teaching program in addition to our general dental practice. We allow dental students from the newest dental school in our state, Western University of Health Sciences, to complete seven-week rotations through our program. In addition, we also have become an accredited site for an Advanced Education in General Dentistry program through Lutheran Medical Center in New York. Through this program we receive two recently graduated resident dentists for a 12-month period.

Our very first Western University of Health Sciences student rotation consisted of third-year dental students, as the school had yet to graduate a class at the time. We were new to the program, and we had not yet developed any curriculum for the students. As a result, they filed charts, entered computer data as needed, and shadowed dentists as we treated our patients. One of the initial students completed several rotations and each time he participated increasingly in our delivery of care and in the development of a curriculum for students. He eventually received his degree as a member of the school's very first graduating class. This same student, now a dentist, returned to APLA Health & Wellness after his graduation as our first Lutheran Medical Center resident dentist. After completing his residency, we hired him, and I am pleased and proud to say that Dr. Jonathan Kahn is now the primary dentist at the Gleicher / Chen Health Center, our new, state-of-the-art clinic in Baldwin Hills.

Gifty-Maria Ntim, MD, MPH Medical Director

Gifty-Maria Ntim joined APLA Health & Wellness as medical director in the summer of 2014 and was instrumental in the opening of the Gleicher / Chen Health Center in Baldwin Hills. She oversees primary medical care services and is also one of the providers, along with Christian Takayama, M.D., who counsels and manages patients in the Center's Pendleton / Goldman PrEP Program.

She describes herself as a physician who is "passionate about eliminating health disparities and empowering patients from underserved communities improve their health outcomes." She is a member of the American College of Physicians as well as the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association.

What initially interested you about working with APLA Health & Wellness?

It's rare to get the opportunity to help build a clinic from the ground up, and this was something that excited me. I believe everyone should have access to excellent quality care, and this was a great opportunity to build on the incredible foundation APLA Health & Wellness had already laid out with STD screening and treatment, as well as HIV testing.

What are some of the challenges facing organizations that focus on LGBT health care?

LGBT health is still an area where there hasn't been a lot of research or data collection. That's a big challenge for us as health care providers, because we don't always have all the information we need to make informed decisions. As we and LGBT health care in general mature, this will become less of an issue.

What do you think is most important for people to know about the medical services APLA Health & Wellness provides?

While we are targeting specific programs for the LGBT population, we are a clinic that serves the entire community. We focus on providing holistic care—that is, focusing on the whole person. We also have partnerships with local health agencies and universities to help deliver programs that are mutually beneficial to our communities.

What is one of the highlights you can share from your time working here?

I think just seeing how far everything has come—especially at the Gleicher / Chen Health Center. I'm very proud of the work we do here, but we have much more to do.

What's next for APLA Health & Wellness' primary medical care services?

One of our big priorities is developing APLA Health & Wellness into a patient-centered medical home practice. Essentially, that means that the patient is the center of everything we do here, and primary care becomes a partnership between practitioners, patients, and their families. This guides everything we do—from wait times to providing appropriate support and education to help our patients take ownership of their care. We are also looking at building more capacity for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis patients, which is such an important HIV-prevention tool that many people still don't know enough about. We definitely see the opportunity to expand our PrEP program and do more outreach and community education about it.

NEWS & NOTEWORTHY



Kicking Off 2015 in High Gear

It's hard to believe 2015 is already well underway. It seems like we were recapping 2014 just a few days ago. That's why I'm excited to tell you what's been happening and give you a glimpse of what's coming up over the next few months.

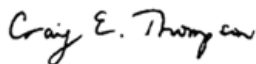
Things are in full swing at both APLA and APLA Health & Wellness as we head further into the New Year. [The Gleicher / Chen Health Center \(GCHC\) is now fully operational](#) and we are seeing hundreds of new medical, dental, and behavioral health patients, including increasing numbers of individuals who want to learn more about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and find out if it's right for them, thanks to our [on-site PrEP program](#). One exciting upcoming addition to GCHC will be the unveiling of our on-site pharmacy. We'll keep you updated on developments, but we expect to open the pharmacy by this summer, which means the health center will truly be a one-stop shop for our patients.

We are also already in full swing planning a variety of events this spring. Our quarterly "HIV Matters" dinner and educational program will take place March 31 at Fiesta Hall in Plummer Park with a distinguished panel providing updates from the 2015 Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections. Among the topics of interest will be results of two studies on so-called PrEP on demand—more of which you can read about [here](#). You can RSVP for HIV Matters at apla.org/hivmatters. In addition, we are hosting dinner and a community forum about PrEP at our Gleicher / Chen Health Center in Baldwin Hills (3743 S. La Brea Ave.) Tuesday, April 7, at 6:30 p.m.

On May 9 we're excited to welcome back S.T.A.G.E. for its 31st show. The longest running HIV/AIDS fund-raiser in Southern California, S.T.A.G.E. is a one-night-only musical extravaganza held at the Saban Theatre in Beverly Hills, at which stars from Broadway and Hollywood come together to perform and help us raise critically needed funds for APLA and APLA Health & Wellness. We're excited for a rousing night of entertainment for a good cause. You can purchase your tickets at stagela.com or keep up to date on [Facebook](#).

All of this—community forums, fund-raisers, a new pharmacy, and more—are examples of our continued commitment to our community and to ensuring that everyone who needs help has access to it. We're humbled that your contributions allow us to innovate our offerings, as well as expand the services we can provide through both APLA and APLA Health & Wellness.

With gratitude,



Craig E. Thompson
Chief Executive Officer
APLA, APLA Health & Wellness



Getting to Know ... Red Circle Project

Building Community Among Native Americans/Alaska Natives in L.A. County

Did you know that APLA Health & Wellness' Red Circle Project (RCP) is the only HIV prevention program in Los Angeles County that specifically provides services to the Native American/Alaska Native community?

What started in 2003 on a one-year grant has flourished and now provides resources, referrals, and group level interventions for Native gay/Two-Spirit men and Native transgender individuals. In addition the program also offers mobile HIV testing to urban Native communities at outreach

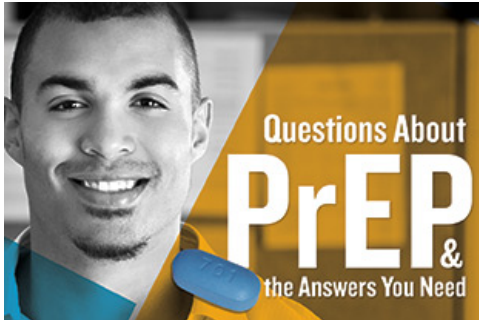
events such as powwows and other cultural events.

The name "Red Circle Project" came to the outreach team at a powwow where a large, red ribbon was blowing in the wind. "At one point that day, the ribbon morphed into a shape that resembled a circle" explains RCP Program Coordinator Michelle Enfield. "It just seemed appropriate that the name would include the 'red' of the AIDS ribbon, as well as a circle, which is reminiscent of the traditional medicine wheel that is commonly found in most Native cultures."

Many Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people have traditionally revered gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and Two-Spirit individuals within their communities. Red Circle Project specifically focuses on this community by providing a safe, supportive environment with HIV education along with culturally competent programming.

"RCP collaborates, educates, advocates, and implements" Enfield says. "We provide HIV education along with harm reduction strategies that keep Native traditional teachings alive, promoting the importance of holistic wellness, as well as a true sense of community here in L.A."

Red Circle Project is funded by Los Angeles County's Office of AIDS Programs and Policy, as well as the City of Los Angeles' AIDS Coordinator's Office. For more information, visit the RCP [Facebook page](#), redcircleproject.com, or contact Michelle Enfield at menfield@apla.org or 323.329.9906.



Join Us for a Community Forum About PrEP

What it is, how it works, where to get it, and more! Tuesday, April 7, at 6:30 p.m. at the Gleicher / Chen Health Center, 3743 S. La Brea Ave. (at Coliseum Street). Free and open to all. Free parking on site.



Volunteer Spotlight: Go for the Gould

APLA Volunteer Doug Gould Talks About Giving Back

For the past four years Doug Gould has volunteered up to four days a week with APLA and our Vance North Necessities of Life Program (NOLP) food pantry at The David Geffen Center, in what he says is an effort to give back to and make an impact on the LGBT community in Los Angeles. We recently met with Doug to talk about his experience as an APLA volunteer and what it means to him.

Why did you start volunteering with APLA?

I've been a part of the gay community in L.A. for the past 40 years so I've always known about APLA and the work it does. [Now] I'm retired with extra free time, and I wanted to make some good use of it. I felt immediately welcomed by the APLA team. They were organized and they trained me and mentored me so I'm able to contribute as much as I can.

What is a typical day at NOLP like for you?

Every day is different. It depends on the number of clients, number of volunteers, and work that needs to be done at NOLP. I mostly do client encounters—helping clients through the paperwork, making sure they sign vouchers to verify they received food. Sometimes I will help put together food bags or do some cleaning, as well.

What's been one of the highlights of your time volunteering here?

Helping a prospective client or a re-enrolling client get through the paperwork to get them qualified to get food. I just want to see them walk out

with food—that's the goal.

What would you say to someone considering volunteering at APLA?

If you really want to contribute to [a] company that needs help, if you really want to make a difference in the organization, come here [to APLA]. The client interaction is fun, and [APLA] gives you a chance to do both—make a difference and enjoy yourself.

With the help of volunteers like Doug, APLA's eight Vance North Necessities of Life Program centers in L.A. County are able to serve thousands of people and distribute nearly 140,000 bags of groceries each year.

If you are interested in volunteer opportunities at APLA, please visit apla.org/get-involved/volunteer for more information.

PARTNER PROFILE



A Friend in Deed

Macy's Brings Fashion and Fun to a Serious Cause

Macy's has a long history of supporting the fight against HIV/AIDS and its commitment continues unabated. More than 30 years ago, at a time when many organizations would not philanthropically support people living with the disease, Macy's was raising life-giving funds for AIDS service organizations around the country, including AIDS Project Los Angeles.

Since 2007, Macy's Passport has raised more than \$1.2 million to support the services APLA provides to people living with HIV/AIDS in Los Angeles County. Nationally, Macy's has given more than \$30 million to HIV/AIDS organizations and research projects over the past 30 years.

"We believe it is incredibly important to give back and support the communities where we are located," Vice President of Media Relations and Cause Marketing for Macy's West Coast Betsy Nelson says. "HIV/AIDS is not over, and there's still so much to do to raise awareness and to make sure people get tested or get care. We're proud to support APLA and other organizations that make it their mission to end this epidemic."

"Macy's was a pioneer in the early days of the AIDS epidemic and remains a committed partner in our work to stop the spread of HIV and help those living with AIDS," APLA and APLA Health & Wellness Chief Operating Officer Craig E. Thompson says. "We always look forward to a night of fashion and fun that also does so much good for our community."

SAVE THE DATES



HIV Matters
March 31

Updates from the 2015 Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections

apla.org/hivmatters



S.T.A.G.E.
May 9

Join us as we celebrate film's contribution to the stages of the Great White Way

stagela.com



Long Beach Pride
May 16-17

Come celebrate all things LGBT at the vibrant festival and parade in L.A. County's second largest city

longbeachpride.com



**Art Project Los Angeles
June 6**

Enjoy a spectacular evening of fine art and bid on incredible pieces you can take home and call your very own

apla.org/artproject

We need you to volunteer with APLA!

For more information, contact Jim Williams, our Volunteer Resources program manager, at jwilliams@apla.org or 213.201.1379.