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News

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*****Two Dallas Physician Assistants
leave for Tonga with the Peace
Corps.

The physician assistant idea is spreading. In fact, the Peace Corps has already taken PAs to the South Pacific, and two Dallas PAs leave July 8 to establish a training program in the kingdom of Tonga.

Both Diana Turner and Dave Casey graduated from the School of Allied Health Sciences of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas in 1977. They married last April 13 and two weeks later received word that they had been accepted for a two-year stint in Tonga, a picture-book island kingdom 1400 miles east of Australia.

As Peace Corps volunteers they will work with the World Health Organization to set up training for PAs in this country with very few doctors.

Until now the Peace Corps has had few openings for PAs, so when this opportunity for two PAs came along, it was just too good to turn down. Now there are more openings, including some on the Peace Corps staff to take care of the overseas volunteers. One of these PAs will be stationed in the capital city of Tonga, Nuku'alofa, with them. Most of the Americans in Tonga are a part of the Peace Corps--two staff members and 82 volunteers.

Most Tongans are Polynesian or Melanesian. Since Tonga was a British protectorate, many people speak English as a second language, but Turner and Casey plan to learn Tongan. They think that will be their biggest challenge. Turner works with Spanish-speaking people in Dallas and believes her Spanish enables her to relate to patients and families in a way that she could not do otherwise. "It helps to be able to joke with the kids and get them to laugh. And, you know, it's hard to joke in another language."

She has worked with a pediatrician at Los Barrios Unidos Clinic since graduation. She also works part-time as an associate instructor in the PA program at the health science center. Casey leaves his job with the Dallas school system where he does the physicals for special education applicants. He is also working on his master's in rehabilitation counseling in the UTHSCD Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

"We aren't leaving Dallas because we don't like our jobs, but we're both sort of in love with long distance," said Casey, the son of an airline executive. Turner grew up in South America where her father worked for an oil company.

Their current pressing problem is deciding what to pack in their 25-pound allowance for professional material. The can have some shipped later. The 80-pound limit for each on personal luggage is no problem. Casey's brother also served in the Peace Corps, and they are taking his advice: The best clothes to wear in a country are the ones you buy there.

They say they don't know what they will find in Tonga, but it's no problem to pack what they will need most--"We're taking our knowledge of health care and open minds."

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