

News

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****Medical student donates time, resources to aid poor in Honduras

People commonly talk about wanting to do something for poor people in third world countries, but few of them put their money where their mouths are. They may donate a few dollars, but not many people are willing to take the time to learn and address first-hand the needs and problems facing people in underprivileged nations.

Such volunteers are especially rare among students committed also to the time- and energy-draining pursuit of a medical degree. Mary Carter, a fourth year medical student at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, is an exception. She has traveled six times to Honduras, taking more than a total of \$17,500 and 3.4 tons of goods with her to aid the people there. During each visit, Mary volunteers at the hospital in El Progreso. Approximately 100,000 people live in the small town and its surrounding villages.

In Honduras she speaks only Spanish and experiences the same illnesses and shortages of water and electricity the people do. In spite of the difficulties, Mary says she has grown to love the Honduran people.

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"Being involved in their struggle to survive continually teaches me lessons about life, especially lessons about what things are truly important," she says.

To finance her trips to Honduras, Mary often worked more than 40 hours a week at two part-time jobs while keeping up with her medical studies. She also has received funding from donors across Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas and from St. Norbert's Parish in her hometown of St. Louis.

Mary said that going to Honduras changed her view of the world. "As a child, I had been taught that the poor of the world were basically happy, simple people who were clean and quaint, but just happened to be poor," she says. "In Honduras I learned that none of those assumptions was true."

Each time she visits Honduras, Mary involves more people in the United States in the "Honduras Project." And for each additional donation, more people in Honduras are helped. "It's very rewarding to work with the people in El Progreso because anything you do for them is a 1,000 percent improvement from their previous situation. They are so appreciative," Mary says.

"Every time I go down there, I look around and see things that have changed. The hospital now has sutures and blood pressure cuffs." The donations also fund several nutritional programs, clinics, kindergartens and vocational schools in El Progreso and the surrounding area.

Mary is planning another visit to Honduras in February 1990. One of her goals is to take a vehicle for the hospital to use as an ambulance. She also will travel to Deesa, India, in November as part

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of an exchange program between the medical center and the Gandhi-Lincoln Hospital in Deesa. The program is sponsored by the Zale Foundation and the Bhansali Trust of India.

Upon completion of her residency training, Mary plans to return and practice medicine in El Progreso. Her dream is to found and direct a hospital/clinic system that will provide preventive medicine and health-care education in addition to medical treatment. The land, tractors, sewage system and utilities have already been donated for the facility, and her idea has the support of the town's mayor, pharmacists, physicians and other key leaders.

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.