



Zed Zha (Med'16) did a five-week elective in a Tanzanian hospital during her final year of medical school. (The patient pictured here gave permission to be photographed.)

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Ophthalmologist Donald Macdonald, MD (MED’80), knew little about global health until he participated in a service trip to Ghana in 2004.

“I was on cloud nine doing this sort of thing,” he says. “And I hate hot weather.”

Since then, Macdonald has performed countless small-incision cataract surgeries free of charge on multiple trips to Africa, as well as Asia and Central America. But he doesn’t believe in the kind of short-term swoop-in and swoop-out service trips that have become popular among Western doctors.

“You can’t show up for a week with fancy machines and then leave,” says Macdonald. His nonprofit, Right to Sight, is currently in the process of building an eye hospital in Tamale, Ghana.

Recently, Macdonald pledged \$100,000 to create the Global Health Experiential Learning Fund at Geisel’s Center for Health Equity. The fund will support the center’s international internships for medical students—students like Mengyi “Zed” Zha (Med’16).

CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY INSPIRES ALUMNI SUPPORT

JENNIFER DURGIN

GEISEL’S CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY BUILDS LONG-TERM, reciprocal partnerships with medically underserved communities at home and abroad. That approach, championed by its director, Lisa V. Adams, MD (Med’90), has inspired several alumni of the medical school to make generous gifts in support of the center.

HUMBLE LISTENING

Last spring, Zha did a five-week elective in a Tanzanian hospital, with support from the Center for Health Equity and funding from the Hanover NH Rotary. Zha is planning for a career in global health and is currently training in the La Crosse-Mayo Family Medicine Residency Program in Wisconsin.

“Poverty itself may look similar everywhere in the world—the starvation, the discrimination, etcetera,” says Zha. “But in the Tanzanian hospital, I saw another monstrous tentacle of poverty—the deathly suffering and the lack of resources to alleviate it.”

Zha’s experiences in Tanzania also reinforced another tenet of global health work that the Center for Health Equity infuses in students—being a good listener.

“American medical students often need to change their mindset from a ‘gunner’—who actively tries to impress by showing off how much they know—to a humble listener,” Zha explains. “I ended up learning more that way. And it’s more respectful.”

PREPARING STUDENTS

Zha and her experience is emblematic of the many Geisel students who are dedicated to working with medically underserved communities and who find the guidance and support they need from the Center for Health Equity, specifically from Dr. Lisa Adams. In addition to directing the center, Adams serves as the associate dean for global health and an associate professor of medicine at Geisel and oversees Dartmouth College’s Global Health Initiative at the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding.

“She has all the right priorities,” says Frank Virnelli, MD (Med’61), of Adams. Virnelli serves on the Center for Health Equity advisory board and has made several generous gifts to support the center’s work.

A retired plastic surgeon, Virnelli has been part of numerous medical missions to Africa and Central and South America. In each of the last two years, a Geisel student has accompanied him and his team to Guatemala to do cleft lip and palette repairs. The students, Tommy Flynn (’19) and Adrianna Stanley (’18), who are both fluent in Spanish, served as interpreters for the medical team.

“It’s a very complex endeavor to bring students to developing countries, and the Center for Health Equity does a wonderful job of preparing them,” adds Virnelli.

RECIPROCAL PARTNERSHIPS

From its beginning, the Center for Health Equity has been committed to not only sending Geisel students to medically underserved regions but also receiving medical students and trainees from those areas.

“I firmly believe that if we are going to expect our international and domestic partners to host our students, we need to offer the same in return,” says Adams.

Geisel has ongoing reciprocal student exchanges with its partners in Tanzania, Rwanda, Kosovo, and, most recently, Chongqing, China.

“The focus on bi-directional education is unique,” notes E. Lynne Kelley, MD (Med’93). Kelley, who is chief medical officer of Senseonics, Inc., serves on the Center for Health Equity advisory board and has also given generously to the Center.

“The choice to donate financially has been easy,” she adds, “as there is complete transparency. The money raised goes directly to help the people intended.”

“Philanthropy is a lifeline to keeping our exchanges active in both directions,” explains Adams. Gifts from alumni and other donors are “absolutely critical to maintaining our program.”

And philanthropy will be critical to growing the program, too.

“It will be great to see how much can be accomplished as more alumni learn about and support the center and its mission,” says Kelley.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY AT <http://geiselmed.dartmouth.edu/globalhealth/center-for-health-equity>

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Lisa V. Adams, MD (Med’90), mentors students interested in working with underserved populations.



Jon Gilbert Fox