Adventures in Liberia

Saadiya Khan

Editor’s Note: As reported in the last issue, several of our faculty recently traveled to Liberia to visit to location of our newly established International Medicine elective there. Dr. Saadiya Khan was the first resident to go and spend a month on a rotation there. Here is her exciting report:

I have always liked to know how different people do things differently, and it was this inquisitive nature that led to my trip to Liberia for an International Health elective. I had no idea of what to expect when boarding the plane, and I started the journey reading a memoir of Africa’s first Women President from Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s book, "This Child Will Be Great". The weather in Monrovia, the capital city was hot and humid, which felt familiar and similar to that in my hometown in Pakistan. I also received special warmth from the people since the Pakistani army has a large presence in Liberia as a part of UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) peace keeping force. I began the elective in the general pediatric ward at John F. Kennedy Hospital. The actual pediatric ward was being renovated and so we were working in a temporary setting with about 30 beds. The start was rough but within a week, things got a lot better. In order to get lab reports, x-rays done and orders carried out the system relies on students. I also made lots of friends in the laboratory, radiology and the pharmacy, and these contacts enabled me to get things done a lot faster.

Among the many cases I saw, a few to mention were measles, typhoid, tetanus, malaria, AID and tuberculosis. While I hope I made a difference to the numerous children I treated, I gained a lot from my experience and made friends with all of them. This experience will always be very near to my heart because of all the respect and love I got from the people. Our profession as physicians is truly humbling because of the way in which our patients welcome us into their lives and decisions. I have greatly enjoyed my experience and intend to go back again, not only to help, but also to get to meet the dear friends I have made.

Report from El Salvador

Joe Domachowske

We just returned from our 2011 adventure to San Vincente, El Salvador. Sixty of our local high school seniors made the trip this year. The main projects were related to clean water and clean air education. The region now has clean well water (6 deep aquifer wells installed by our team), and the people no longer burn their plastic trash (clean air)! Improvements in community nutrition, with a focus on maternal-infant health, is now possible since the intestinal parasite loads are lower. The most objective and impressive evidence that a change was made is that the mean birth weight is up from 2007, and the infants are thriving. Back in 2007, the most common ‘complaint’ heard in our clinic was abdominal pain and anorexia. With clean water, and aggressive efforts at ‘deworming’, this is a complaint that is rare in 2011.

The poultry that we donated in 2007 continue to thrive providing a much needed protein source (corn, beans, and sugar cane don’t quite do it), and the irrigation pond is almost complete, so a tilapia farm will be started in the coming months. The community leaders have further developed the irrigation system we began in 2008 and now grow enough mango, papaya, bananas, and small vegetables to support a micro-business for cash flow, and a diet with more variety.

One of my favorite stories from 2009 is related to a conversation I had with the local leadership. We were asking why children only attend
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school for an hour a day. The response was that there was only one teacher and she needed to see each grade level daily, so formal instruction was limited. We offered to support a second teacher. The government declined. Turns out that the government is obligated to provide one teacher for each school building. One building, one teacher. To me, the solution was obvious. We build another school. Working with the community, we raised money, bought the supplies and built the new schoolhouse in 2010. When we arrived this year, we were happy to find that the community now had two teachers AND a principal! Now all the kids can be in school for half days with instruction, and literacy will improve. In addition, some of our high school kids from Syracuse collected money to start a scholarship program so the graduates of the local school could continue on with advanced instruction in a neighboring community (tuition is $200 a year per student). Our teenagers raised funds to provide 16 scholarships.

The quality of life in San Vincente has changed in obvious ways. The interventions that we have been able to facilitate have led to lasting, sustainable benefits for the locals. In the last 5 years, more than 250 of our children here in Syracuse have been exposed to this experience. Some of them are already continuing local, national, and even international humanitarian work. That has to be a good thing.

Report from Belize
Christy Rivers
For the second year in a row, I escaped the Syracuse winter to travel to Central America with the intention of learning international medicine. This year, my husband and two kids went with me and we stayed with my parents in Dangriga, Belize. I worked with Dr. Sharon Lewis, one of two pediatricians in the town. We saw a range of illness from pneumonia to germ cell teratoma. I learned firsthand how malnutrition contributes to illness, and I experienced the frustration of not having tests and treatments available when I needed them. On the other hand, my daughter developed pneumonia and I was prepared to pay as I would here for an x-ray, ED visit and medications. The entire cost of her medical care was $2.50 US. Overall, it was a great opportunity for all of us and I am thankful for the chance to have gone.

Christy and Dr. Sharon Lewis in Belize

Heading to Japan
The Crier just learned that former resident Shinpei Shibata just left for a short term medical mission in Japan with Doctors Without Borders. Here is Shinpei’s note: “I decided to join in a small Japanese physician organization in Sendai, where there were many victims from tsunami/earthquake. I am going to Japan to help some pediatric patients (including orphans) and some adults between 3/26 - 4/6. It is a short mission but I believe this will give me an insight of what is really going on, since mass media and internet don’t give me a clear picture. Thank you, and wish me good luck.” Our thoughts and prayers are with Shinpei and all of the children in Japan who he will be helping there.

Shining Lights
Congratulations to two members of our department who were the recipients of this year’s Shining Lights Awards from Enable of CNY. Leola Rogers received the Jerrideth Wilson Volunteer Recognition Award and Carl Crosley received the Lifetime Achievement Award. They will both be honored at Enable’s awards celebration on April 28th. http://www.upstate.edu/gch/images/education/enable.pdf

Racing to the Finish Line
March was Child Life Month and it was filled with all kinds of special activities including the annual Pinewood Derby on March 25th. The derby was run by the Boy Scouts. Members including Timothy A. Herne, Senior District Executive serving Cayuga and Interlakes Districts Longhouse Council, BSA, Peter Lonomiades, Paul Thompson, and scouts Aaron and Paul Starr, Kramer Kwaczala, Todd Lowe, and Dustin Robinson (all members of the Class of 2010 Eagle Scouts from Longhouse Council of the Boy Scouts of America). All of the contestants and their families (not to mention the whole GCH staff) had a great time thanks to their efforts.

Hula Wii
Speaking of Child life month, the Crier received the following anonymous news tip from one of the Wii events: “We might be able to use this to recruit future residents if we show them this during recruiting” https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=1860006055359
The Brunch Bunch
On Sunday, March 13 Dr. Chang was once again the gracious hostess to the annual brunch at her home. Unfortunately, no photographers were present this year to document the event. Dr. Chang attributes this to everyone being too busy sitting around, eating and talking. Resident brunchers included Matt R., Kate, Christy, Priyanka, Katie, Jaclyn, and Karen.

The Best Pediatric Doctors
The Good Life CNY Magazine (Nov/Dec 2010) featured quite a few of our pediatric doctors and subspecialists in 2010 Best Doctors in America list. In addition, they did a feature article on our very own Nader Atallah, which was worth passing on (for example, did you know he loves classic rock?). We are proud (but not surprised) about all of our pediatricians who made the list.


A Hair Raising Experience
Congratulations and thanks to Dr. Frank Smith who once again this year volunteered to have his head shaved to raise money to help conquer kids’ cancer at St. Baldrick’s, on March 27th. Our roving reporter and photographer, Beth Nelsen tells us he was the top fundraiser locally, raising close to $8,000! Way to go, Dr. Smith.

High Quality
Upstate’s Friends & Advocates recently announced that several members of Upstate Medical University’s Joslin Diabetes Center medical staff, two of whom are members of our department, were recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance for excellence in the care and treatment of patients with diabetes. Congratulations to Roberto Izquierdo, M.D. and Irene Sills, M.D. for being recognized for delivering excellent care.

Expanding His Practice
The Crier recently received this picture from Dr. Stuart Trust. Apparently, having a second pediatrician working with him (not pictured), he has been able to expand the patient population he is working with.

Welcome Baby Emma
Congratulations to Kate Robinson on the long awaited arrival of Emma Elise Kohberger on March 19th! Kate tells the Crier, “She's here! 7lb 14oz 20.5 inches!! Looks like her daddy...she's a good eater and napper!”

Double Match!
As most of you have heard, we ended up with another great bunch of interns in the 2011 Match. Two of the individuals who will be starting with us in June actually had a double match in March. Marwan Al Aswad and Lina Hajar not only both matched here in Syracuse, but also got matched to each other. They were married on March 5th in Lebanon, just a few days before the Match. Double congratulations, Marwan and Lina! We look forward to seeing you soon.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS
4/4 Nick Bennett
4/11 Carrie Brindisi Greene
4/19 Katie Fry
4/21 Carol Plumbley
4/25 Jim Listman