



Student-Led Initiative Expands, Bringing Preventive Medicine to Underserved Communities

The newly formed local chapter of Medical Missions Abroad – led by a University of Miami Miller School of Medicine master's student in biomedical science – now directs about 75 of the University's undergraduate, postdoctoral, and medical students to where the need is greatest.



From left: Dr. Kevin Landau; Robert Eysler; Timothy Guerard; Betsy Barrueta; Randy Shumpert; Karen Grac; Kartiana Desir; Valentina Caicedo; and Brian Flores.

One aim is to provide preventive medicine and education to people who otherwise have no access to a primary care



physician or any other source of preventive medicine. Another goal is to help people before their medical or health conditions progress to the point where they have no choice but to seek emergency care.

Prevention and earlier identification of health problems can translate to better outcomes for residents in these underserved areas, said Timothy Guerard, Class of 2023, the student who leads the local chapter.

“They might wait until the last minute to seek care when it's an emergency or something happens and they don't immediately have a doctor they can go to,” Guerard said.

After consulting with local physicians and community leaders, these trained volunteers bring needed health screenings, treatment recommendations, and education to people where they live. Thanks to the hard work of the initiative's clinical coordinator, Randy Shumpert, and the team, the initiative has expanded from providing health care outreach at a church-affiliated food bank in Boca Raton to serving communities across South Florida.

Students Volunteer with Hospitals, Providers in Foreign Countries

As the name suggests, Medical Missions Abroad also addresses health needs in countries around the world. Recent missions include travel to Bali, Columbia, Nepal, and Ghana, for example.

“Our medical students just got back from Colombia in the fall. They spent a month with the tribes that we'll be working with this summer, these tribes who don't even see doctors,” Guerard



said.

The volunteers work with local hospitals and health care providers to help where they can, tailoring interventions based on available resources.

Traveling and spending time overseas can be expensive. Guerard and the other Miller School students they pay their own expenses, even when the group travels abroad. The local chapter also fundraises. A prime example is a partnership with a food concession at the Hard Rock Stadium in Hollywood, Florida. The student volunteers make food and are able to keep a portion of the proceeds.

The Medical Missions Abroad initiative can be a valuable experience for undergraduate students to learn more about medical outreach and preventive health care. After training, the students can take patient histories, measure vital signs, and complete patient intake procedures. “They really get this clinical hands-on experience, and it’s really good at launching their exposure into these fields,” Guerard said.

The most impactful experience is learning how relatable people are in different communities here and abroad, Guerard added.

“You see commonalities with people in all different parts of the world,” he said. “During the mission in Ghana, for example, we would come back from the clinic, and we would play with the kids. We played soccer with them, right beside our hotel. We spent hours just doing that. There are little things that you expect to be super different, but they’re not.”

To learn more about or volunteer with Medical Missions Abroad, email Guerard directly at txg599@miami.edu.



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