

Harnessing the passion for global health at Duke

part I in a series

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This summer, Duke undergraduates are in Kenya, India and Durham working with underserved populations. Duke faculty are researching cures and vaccines for AIDS and other infectious diseases that unduly burden developing countries. Duke environmentalists are studying how pollution contributes to the persistent inequalities in birth weight and premature birth among underserved populations in North Carolina and are investigating the effects of climate change on malaria transmission. Can anyone doubt that global health is flourishing at Duke?

I came to Duke last November to direct the newly created Duke Global Health Institute, the mission of which is to reduce disparities in health worldwide, including in our local community, through global health education, research and service.

I was drawn to Duke because of its rich tradition of interdisciplinary work and its commitment to draw on the intellectual assets of the entire University to address global challenges. As I spent my first months listening to many at Duke share what excited them about global health, the interest among students was palpable. Students want-and demand-education about the many facets of global health, from the biology of AIDS to how international law can affect health disparities. And they have an unquenchable desire to make a difference through service.

This surge of interest in global health comes at an exciting time. There is growing consensus that all people have a basic human right to access to essential medications and vaccines. The recognition that a healthy population is essential for economic and social development has led to increased support for global health research and programs by governments and organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. More people understand that improving the health of populations the world over requires participation of scholars from many different disciplines.

DGHI has the enviable luxury of being a University-wide institute, able to support and build on the wisdom and energy of faculty and students from every school-business, divinity, engineering, environment, graduate, law, medicine, nursing and undergraduate.

During Orientation Week, newcomers can meet students who have channeled their passions for global health into education and volunteer experiences, many of which will be funded by DukeEngage in the future.

In early September, the Institute's Center for Health Policy will host a conference on sustainable development, featuring student presentations on summer experiences in global health. In late November, DGHI and the Fuqua School of Business will co-sponsor a conference with the World Health Organization on the private sector's responses to the health worker shortage crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa.

We plan to develop an undergraduate major in global health, work with the Career Center to offer undergraduate global health career counseling, establish masters and doctoral programs in global health, add a third-year global health track for medical students and promote campus activism, advocacy and service.

In research, we will assist current Duke projects in global health and develop a focused portfolio of new research initiatives on priority topics such as HIV/AIDS and other emerging infections, obesity, environmental health and the interrelationship of gender health and poverty.

We envision Duke as "the" destination for scholars and practitioners in global health, as well as the producer of the next generation of global health experts and leaders. And our service efforts will show Duke's commitment to providing practical and sustainable solutions to global health problems.

By harnessing the passion for global health-by coordinating what many at Duke already do and expanding what the University and Medical Center offer-DGHI will allow students and faculty to continue to tackle one of humanity's greatest challenges.

This column is the first of a nine-part series that will explore some global health issues. I encourage you to read more about the surge of global health activity at Duke and our university's impassioned endeavors to achieve health equality worldwide-and to find ways to be part of this exciting effort.

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