Inside Information

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MSU College of Human Medicine

Fulbright winner to study efficiency in Honduras

On his first trip to Honduras eight years ago with a medical mission group, Evan Milton was struck by how a health care system’s efficiency — or lack of it — can affect the wellbeing of the people it’s supposed to serve.

“I had never really considered how a health system impacts the health of people,” said Milton, a fourth-year student in the College of Human Medicine. “I was really enthralled with being able to help in a very personal and immediate way.”

The experience piqued his interest in medicine, particularly in public health, and it stirred an enduring connection with the people of that Central American country.

“Always in the back of my mind I’ve wanted to get back to Honduras,” he said.

As it happens, Milton will return to Honduras in the fall under a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to study how to improve the efficiency of medical care there.

By law, Honduras has a universal health care system. In practice, it is underfunded and overwhelmed, he said, leaving many residents, particularly those too poor to afford private care, with inadequate or no medical care.

Milton holds a bachelor’s degree in biological sciences from Michigan Technological University and a master’s in public health from the University of Michigan. While studying public health, he began thinking of attending medical school.

“Having that clinical knowledge is another skill set that I really wanted,” he said, so he applied and was accepted at the College of Human Medicine.

Before starting medical school, he worked for a research group called Quality Improvement for Complex Chronic Conditions operated by the University of Michigan Health System and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Among other studies, Milton researched how the slump in the U.S. economy was adversely affecting the ability of chronically ill people in Honduras to receive medical care, since relatives in this country no longer could afford to send financial help. He also studied the risk factors for type 2 diabetes in Santa Cruz de Yojoi, a small city in Honduras.

Last summer, Milton applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to conduct a community based needs assessment, looking for ways to improve health care in Santa Cruz de Yojoi through partnerships between the public and private systems. This spring, he received word his grant was approved. He hopes to begin his 10-month research in September, taking that time off from medical school.

Faculty at the College of Human Medicine “have been very supportive of this and encouraging,” Milton said. “I’m excited to have this opportunity to think long about where I want to see it taking me.”

Ultimately, he hopes to go into primary care and academic medicine while continuing his research in public health. His work in Honduras, he said, could hold implications for health care in this country.

“Using resources better is something I’m interested in and want to take to my work in the U.S., making systems work more efficiently,” he said.