MSU medical student earns scholarship for commitment

During her rotation in obstetrics and gynecology, third-year College of Human Medicine student Kelly Ketchum, assisted in the delivery of a baby Tuesday.

Over the weekend, she helped deliver five more.

“I almost cried every time,” she said. “It’s a beautiful moment. It’s just beautiful. You’re with the patient at one of the happiest moments of their lives. You feel what they feel.”

Those six deliveries were not Ketchum’s first. On a medical mission the previous summer, she assisted in many deliveries in Uganda. At times the facilities were less advanced than in the United States and the outcomes often less joyful.

Because of her commitment to primary care for underserved populations, Ketchum recently was awarded a National Health Service Corps (NHSC) scholarship, which will cover her tuition, books and fees and provide a stipend for living expenses during her last two years of medical school.

In return, after completing her residency, she will spend two years providing primary care in an underserved area of the United States, which she intended to do anyway.

“This is the right child for that,” said Dr. Patricia Brewer, a professor of radiology and assistant director of the university’s Block II curriculum, who wrote a letter recommending Ketchum for the scholarship. “It’s an honor for Kelly, and it’s an honor for the medical school as well.

The college “hopes to recruit people like just Kelly,” Brewer said. “We have so many who serve in so many capacities.”

At any given time, five or so College of Human Medicine students are studying under NHSC scholarships, financial aid advisor Christy Cotton estimated, reflecting the effort the college has made to seek “passion for serving underserved people.”

The scholarship will free Ketchum of the tremendous debt many young physicians face.

“Not having to take out loans for two years is really great,” Ketchum said, since it will allow her to practice medicine with less concern about earning an income large enough to pay off student loans.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created the scholarship program to increase the number of primary care physicians in the areas where they are needed most. When Ketchum applied, she told 500 people, including her parents, because she didn’t want them to be disappointed if she was turned down.

Yet the program seemed a perfect fit for her. Even in her teens, she was drawn to public service, volunteering at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing.

While in high school, she traveled to Peru to help with an ophthalmology mission. As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, she worked in a small clinic in a rural area of Costa Rica, and she mon-

ted underprivileged, preschool children in Ann Arbor.

She brought that same commitment when she moved to Grand Rapids for her last two years in the College of Human Medicine, volunteering at a homeless shelter and in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

While taking a class in refugee health taught by Dr.经贸 Smith, the College of Human Medicine’s director of Service Learning and Global Health, Ketchum expressed an interest in international medicine. Smith suggested she talk with Dr. Michael Krowin, a professor of psychiatry and neurology and ophthalmology, who had spent years studying the effects of HIV and other diseases on children in Africa.

Thus, in the summer of 2014, Ketchum spent six weeks in a rural area of Uganda studying the neural cognition of children with HIV.

When she had time, she wandered through the hospital wards asking questions and offering help.

She was struck by the primitive nature of the care, with as many as 15 patients sharing a room, their beds covered with mosquito netting, and far too few physicians to meet the need.

In the labor and delivery area, she offered to help the overworked midwives. Some women who needed C-sections were denied the surgery, because no physician was available to perform it. As a result, many babies were stillborn. That’s when Ketchum decided to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology.

“I think I could provide the resources there that I see here,” she said. “I realized the level of need there, and I thought I could actually make a big impact.”

She considered it a longshot when she applied for the National Health Service Corps scholarship, but her record of service and her desire to continue helping the needy weighed heavily in her favor.

In late August, the email came. Of the 2,100 students who had applied for the scholarships, fewer than 200 were chosen, according to a spokes-
woman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Ketchum was one of them.

“Morally, of my life,” she said. “Not only because it means her next two years of medical school are covered, but because she looks forward to helping patients in underserved areas.”

After medical school, after her residency and after her two-year commitment providing care to the underserved, she plans to continue in that vein.

She’s thinking of joining Doctors Without Borders, living in an impoverished country where the need is greatest.

Eventually, she might return to this country, but her commitment will remain the same.

“I’ve always been interested in medicine my whole life,” she said. “I’ve always been pulled toward helping people, as cliché as that sounds. As a physician, ideally, the goal is to help them.”