



# A legacy of service

35 years after its start,  
Medical Practicum  
still changes lives

**M**anchester students who go on the Medical Practicum pay more than \$2,000 each to walk through mud, ride in dugout canoes, sleep in hammocks wrapped in mosquito netting, drink filtered river water and eat rice and beans.

That their names go on a waiting list for this self-inflicted hardship is a testament to just how powerful the January experience in Nicaragua is.

“It’s life-changing, and I’d do it again in a heartbeat,” says **Emily Clark ’18**, a sophomore from Peru, Ind. “When you come back you are the most grateful person,” says the biology-chemistry major who no longer takes flush toilets, clean water and basic health for granted.

The Medical Practicum at Manchester turned 35 this year and has become a rite of passage for many students eyeing health care careers. Students work side-by-side with volunteer medical providers from the United States to provide health care and dental services in a clinic setting. Jeff Osborne, associate professor of chemistry, leads it now, but one of his predecessors, **Ed Miller ’56**, launched the program in January 1981 at the suggestion of DePauw University where a similar program was already in place.

“Why couldn’t I do that?” Miller asked himself. Now professor emeritus of chemistry, Miller and his wife, **Martha ’56**, were seasoned international travelers and an ideal couple to blaze the trail. Without their travel experience, says Miller, “I would never have had the confidence to take students to rural areas of Central America.”

From the start, the practicum has included a faculty leader, students and health care professionals – often Manchester alumni – who donate their skills and time to provide care for underserved people. The first practicum group went to Guatemala and in subsequent years to Panama, Honduras, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. For more than 20 years, it has served villagers in remote areas of Nicaragua.

Osborne has led the past eight practicum trips, each time strengthening relationships with local communities and local health care system providers in northern Nicaragua. His capable Spanish helps him manage the complex, cross-cultural relations and arrange the logistics of meals, housing, supplies, translators, and transportation that involves air travel, buses, trucks and canoes.

Under Osborne, Manchester’s practicum became in 2010 the first foreign medical mission group since Doctors Without Borders to provide health care to the remote villages that they now visit, accessible only by motorized dugout canoes. And, with his leadership, the MU group introduced the modern screen (HbA1c) for diabetes, performed the first wide-scale screenings for Chagas disease and *H. pylori* infection, and offered the area’s first screenings for possible cervical cancer with on-the-spot cryotherapy treatment. They have added community health education to their services, set up a scholarship fund in one village, and expanded their services to include veterinary care.

To finance the annual trip, Osborne fundraises by seeking donations and writing grant proposals to purchase medicines and medical



On previous page: MU students and professional health care providers walk across a footbridge near the clinic in Nicaragua.

Clockwise from top left: the MU team prepares to leave in dugout canoes for their first village stop; **Dr. Emilie Blough ’04**, a veterinarian, works with livestock; **Amanda Cooper ’13** holds a young Nicaraguan child during the January 2013 practicum; **Dr. Lois Johnson ’52**, pediatrician, performs an examination.



VIDEO

See the video at [magazine.manchester.edu](http://magazine.manchester.edu)



and dental supplies and to build an endowment for such expenses. The program has its own website, [medicalpracticum.org](http://medicalpracticum.org) and gifts can be made there or on the University's website. To date, the practicum's largest benefactor has been Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Co. in Fort Wayne, whose president is MU accounting alumnus **Mark Robison '86**.

Ultimately, the trip could not happen without the dozen or so health care providers each year who take vacation time or unpaid leave from their jobs and practices to provide the health care in the clinics. "It's a large contribution they make," says Osborne. "We have been truly fortunate to be joined by high quality professionals who are exceptional role models."

Working so closely with the providers not only offers MU students valuable hands-on experience, but also unparalleled access to the wisdom and life perspectives of these health care providers. "It gave me focus," says **Chase Holford '17**, a junior from Valparaiso, Ind., who plans to become a physician. The practicum "really makes me want to pursue medicine in a way I haven't felt before."

**Cally Miller '17**, a senior from Elkhart, Ind., agrees. She hopes to get into the rural medicine program of the Indiana University School of Medicine, and says the practicum

has changed her priorities, her perspective on wealth and her compassion for less-fortunate people.

Like Chase and Emily, Cally can't thank Osborne enough for leading the practicum. "It's a lot of work for him," she says, "but it's totally worth everything he puts into it."

A reunion of all Medical Practicum alumni is planned at Homecoming on Oct. 8, 2016, and will feature an encore lecture from Miller and Osborne. They are proud of the legacy, the help provided to impoverished people and the rich educational experiences given to Manchester students over the years. "The way we live," says Miller, "is not how most of the people in the world live."

By Melinda Lantz '81



Clockwise from top left: **Eric Cupp '16** provides a wellness check; **Paul Fry-Miller '75** (center), a physician assistant, works at the clinic; **Alyssa Machamer '10** (top) and **Kassie Seidenstucker '11 Smithey** help patients; **Dr. Rachel Long '06**, (center), performs a procedure with assistance from **Jessica Noll '17**; Dr. Ari Cylus, a dentist, works on a patient with help from **Khadijat Ishola-Gbenla '11** (center) and **Sarah Lauinger '12**; and **Ed Miller '56**, professor emeritus of chemistry and founder of the Medical Practicum, checks supplies.



## Practicum 2016 by the numbers

- 16 students
- 7 physicians, 1 dentist, 1 pharmacist, 1 dental assistant, 1 lab coordinator and 2 nurses
- 1,731 medical consultations
- 2,839 prescriptions filled
- 946 vaccinations given
- 151 dental patients and 256 extractions
- 60 cows, 5 dogs and 113 pigs dewormed
- 924 lab tests performed
- \$17,414 used for reduced price medicines and medical/dental supplies
- Thousand of dollars worth of medicines and medical/dental supplies acquired through donation

