COM-P Professor Gives Back With Donation to Support Student Scholarships

College of Medicine ? Phoenix
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Dr. William Dolan entered the field of medicine to help others. He has performed surgeries in the Amazon, served in the U.S. armed forces and, most recently, helped students pursue their medical school dreams.

"I feel so grateful that I have been blessed with family, faith and country, as well as the skills to make a difference," he said. "My biggest accomplishment is making a positive difference with the healing touch."

Dolan, a clinical associate professor of surgery at the UA College of Medicine ? Phoenix, and his wife, Kari, have made a $25,000 donation and an additional $25,000 pledge to the college for student scholarships. The scholarship will benefit two awardees this academic year, and additional awards will be made next year.

Dolan is one example of employee giving. Earlier this month, UA President Robert C. Robbins kicked off this year's UA Cares giving campaign, calling for a 30 percent increase in the number of employees making donations. The increase, if met, would bring the number of employees who donate from a little over 700 to nearly 1,000. The campaign runs through Nov. 30.

Giving to the UA is "an important way to give back and say thank you," said Dolan, who is active in case-based instruction and the anatomy lab, and who previously served as a career and professional adviser at the college. "It supports students and gives hope to the next generations of physicians we so desperately need."

Dolan has always been interested in science and medicine. He still has the illustration of the organ systems with its multiple transparencies that fascinated him when he was 6 years old.

But he pursued medicine because he wanted to work with Esperanca, a Phoenix-based organization that provides health care to poor populations around the world. The organization had begun a medical project for residents of the Amazon region of Brazil.

"I chose surgery, as I felt I could do the most good in an austere environment, especially for the two medical emergencies that the traditional healer could not treat: obstructed labor and obstructed hernia," he said.

In 1979, after a five-year general surgery residency at St. Joseph Hospital in Milwaukee, Dolan moved to Santarém, Pará, Brazil, on the Tapajós River, where he lived for six years while working for Esperanca providing care to communities facing a multitude of health disparities. He did a great deal of primary care and family practice with a special emphasis on preventive measures, such as immunizations, education about clean water and breastfeeding.
As Esperanca's program director for 15 years, Dolan also coordinated the many volunteer surgery teams from all over Arizona and the U.S. that traveled to Brazil. He performed general surgery and, when needed, anesthesia care.

"It's a privilege to do this type of work," Dolan said. "Sometimes you have to pay to do it and not get paid. It is a tremendous honor to come into these people’s lives and to care for them."

Dolan worked with surgical teams doing cleft lip repairs, hysterectomies, gallbladder removal and other procedures. Many of the patients earned less than a $1 a day, so they couldn't afford these types of operations.

"Everyone involved in this healing work found it extremely rewarding," he said. "After our operations, the elderly blinded by cataracts could see, those with painful hernias were cured and children with cleft lip deformities received a new, beautiful face. It is indeed more blessed to give than to receive."

He recalled treating a child with a cleft lip. In an hour, the operation was completed, and the child had what looked like a new face. His mother said, in Portuguese, "My God, my God, it's a miracle." Dolan said moments like that made it worthwhile.

"We were helping a community and making a huge difference," Dolan said. "We not only treated the patient, but trained the locals to hopefully take over and do this on their own. That's an important component with international work."

Dolan completed 15 years of international health work with Esperanca, then began working for the Phoenix VA Health Care System in 1989. He served as chief of surgery for 13 years and retired from full-time work in 2011.

At the age of 44, he joined the U.S. Army, then transferred to the U.S. Navy in 2000. In 2015, he retired from the Navy, which included a tour in Afghanistan in 2013.

"The idea of service and helping our troops in a hostile and adverse environment was very important to me," he said. "The challenge was there and it was stepping up to the plate and doing my job for our country."

When asked about the most successful part of his career, Dolan said he is thankful that he has been able to provide the healing touch to so many people through medicine.

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