

Full Circle

Medical missions, educational resources online, international research collaborations and cooperative clinical trials — globalism can take many forms, often with benefit right here at home. Joseph Kolars, M.D. (Fellowship 1989), the Medical School’s first senior associate dean for education and global initiatives, provides a big-picture look at a burgeoning trend among universities throughout the United States.

Q: What is globalism in today’s academic medical context?

A: Globalism as it relates to medicine and medical education concerns itself with improving health and achieving equity for all people worldwide. A lot of global health issues pertain to us in southeast Michigan by virtue of the fact that we have people from all over the world traveling here, living among us, enriching our communities.

Q: What is the spectrum of global activities in which the Health System is involved?

A: They cover the three big missions of research, education and service. A large number of research collaborations are growing between our faculty and faculty around the world; these are to mutual benefit. We recently went on an academic mission to China where we’re trying to forge collaborations with schools and universities. Among our students, residents, fellows, faculty and staff, there’s tremendous interest in learning, research and service experiences in other parts of the world. We want to help strengthen health care overseas so those countries can better serve their own communities. In turn, I believe that we’ll learn lessons that will

help us to provide better care here in the United States.

Q: Are we a leader in globalism among higher education institutions?

A: By virtue of the strength of our institution and our commitment in this area, we’re very much a leader. Students today see that working globally informs what we do locally, and they want to be part of that process. A lot of the best students are attracted to schools that embrace global initiatives. It’s the same for our faculty and staff. We’re a leading academic institution, and we see a duty to share that with other places.

Q: What are the goals, short-term and long?

A: We’re trying to create growth opportunities for our faculty and trainees, and to be a good global citizen. By strengthening the globe we strengthen ourselves. When we’re looking at things as diverse as climate change, the impact of energy production, or epidemics, it’s very important to be part of the community that’s wrestling with these issues because it prepares us locally to deal with the same issues. We consider this to be a valuable academic and

scholarly pursuit. It’s not just a fringe item, it’s pretty central to our values.

Q: What determines which countries and institutions we work with?

A: Our collaborations are based upon connections that faculty have with people in different settings, due to scholarly interests, research, education, or just personal ties to their home countries. Some of these coalesce into multidimensional programs that extend beyond one faculty member or one lab. Some come together just out of convenience because of the strength of what started off as an individual collaboration. One problem with people from other parts of the world coming to the U.S. to train is that they often don’t go back, depleting some of the most important resources for a lot of developing countries. Our obstetrics and gynecology department has reversed that in Ghana, going to that country for more than 20 years to train people there. That team, under Tim Johnson’s leadership, has trained more than 40 ob/gyns; all but one has stayed in Ghana. That’s globalism at its best.

Interview by Rick Krupinski

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