

# The New Generation of Practitioners

One way to prepare for the future challenges of climate change is to give our next generation of public health practitioners the opportunities and experience to identify and treat emerging diseases and to understand the cultures and ways of life that may have brought these diseases to our country.

For me, the answer lies in international opportunities. As a junior pre-med, public health major, I have fallen in love with the field of public health. I have always wanted to be a doctor, and have now found a way to both heal and prevent disease. My life goal is to build clinics in underserved and forgotten villages around the world. Some of my classmates will work in public health agencies closer to home, but all of us share a global concern that has changed the way we look at health care and health needs.

This summer I had an opportunity to work in Central America and I feel that my whole outlook has changed because of this single trip. I helped conduct triages and run clinics in small villages around Belize. International Service Learning opened my eyes to a whole world of medicine and culture.

Along with being humbled and inspired, I learned about common diseases that most Americans may not even have heard of. I was shown different versions of certain diseases, exposed to the conditions that cause them, and introduced to the tests and remedies available in Belize. After my return, I received a message from a fellow volunteer from the trip. She had developed an unusual rash on her ankle. Doctors in her hometown in Montana couldn't identify it, but suggested ointment and ibuprofen. We decided to contact our host doctor in Belize and (as expected) he was able to identify the rash and suggest a treatment right away. It hit me then that American health workers are not exposed to the diversity we need.

Next summer I plan to travel to Kenya. I hope to have the chance to continue traveling to as many different countries, in as many different climate regions as possible to maximize my exposure to diversity in people, ways of life, and medical concerns. This variety will introduce me to new conditions and rich culture that will help me assess situations and understand what caused them. Whether these new diseases show up in immigrants, via travelers, or by zoonotic hosts, I hope to be able to recognize and treat them, and prevent others from catching the diseases.

The public health track has moved toward a global focus in recent years. I see optimism, innovation, and idealism in my fellow students. We are inspired by

the work of our elders in the field and, like any other rising generation, we want to do more. I know students who want to travel to Darfur, Tibet, Guatemala, Cuba, North Korea... we see no limits. I understand that we may be perceived as a bit too idealistic, but is that really possible? How will any global health progress be made in these once-forbidden areas if we are afraid to expand our borders and address issues outside our comfort zone?

The University of Washington and Seattle in general seem to be a center for global progress, especially in the expertise of health. The UW's new global health department introduces new course work and even an undergraduate major (pending) in response to this movement. Our eyes have been opened to new opportunities at a crucial time in our world's progress. This includes a chance to address global warming. From a global perspective, we are seeing new and re-emerging infectious diseases due to the expanding range of animal hosts and changing seasonal patterns.

Industrialization and other human impacts create new challenges for public health. International travel is becoming more popular, more and more people are migrating to America, and climate change is increasing the span of disease-causing agents. Students and current health practitioners will need to reach previously underserved populations if we are going to be able to fight future infectious diseases in America and overseas. America is usually not the first to come into contact with the infectious diseases that purge nations as a whole, or more specifically the type of diseases that will emerge from the havoc of climate change and natural disasters. This is where international familiarity comes into play.

Please encourage your children, students, interns, and all young people who share a passion for making a difference to explore new territories and to learn the health issues of those peoples. Enable them to seek experiences that will introduce them to new cultures, new needs, and new ideas. Our awareness may be the key to saving lives in the future. ■

Photo: Courtesy of Darrah Kauhane-Floerke



Darrah Kauhane-Floerke (left) with Rachael Heck of the University of Oregon at their first clinic in the village of Arenol, on the border of Belize and Guatemala. Because of the black market for the over-the-counter medications, local police set them up in the local jail for security.

Darrah K.  
Kauhane-Floerke

## Author

Darrah Kauhane-Floerke is a native of Hawai'i. She shares a love of the islands with thousands in the greater Seattle area. Her desire to serve the needs of others guides her daily efforts.