

Medical mission: Brody graduates heading to Honduras

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Jessica Weeks and Heang Lim are taking an alternative road toward medical residency.

After graduating from East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine on Saturday, their paths lead more than 1,000 miles away to Santa Lucia, a rural town in western Honduras.

Weeks and Lim are leaving later this month to perform medical mission work for the third

poorest country in the western hemisphere through the nonprofit, non-governmental organization Shoulder to Shoulder.



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Jessica Weeks, right, is putting off her residency to do health care work in rural Honduras. Also pictured is Sue Faircloth with Brody's Office of Student Affairs.

"I would hope we contribute to improving the overall health of their community, in whatever small way," Weeks said. "It's cliché to say make a difference, but this is why we got into medicine."

As part of their mission, Weeks and Lim said they will help staff the medical clinic, improve the rural primary referral center and work with the medical brigades.

Dr. Jeff Heck, a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine and executive director of Shoulder to Shoulder, said the region where Weeks and Lim will be working suffers greatly from poverty. He said 60 percent of the population lives under the world poverty level and 27 percent live in extreme poverty, meaning less than one dollar per day.

"It's a hard place to live," Heck said. "They are going to approach the care of their patients, especially poor people, in a very different way as a result of this experience."

Weeks and Lim budgeted \$12,000 to cover their expenses for the nine months they are abroad. The vast majority, Weeks said, will be spent on insurance and air fares.



Greg Eans/The Daily Reflector [\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Heang Lim, left, graduated from ECU's Brody School of Medicine over the weekend and will be traveling to Honduras at the the end of this month for mission work. Also pictured is Debbie Whitley with the Office of Student Affairs at Brody.

To this point, they have raised about \$7,000 in donations.

Although the pair does plan to travel back in six months for residency interviews, Weeks and Lim said they will return to Honduras for the final three months if they can raise the remaining money.

"For two dollars a day, you can feed a starving physician," Lim said with a laugh.

Their classmates decided to make a \$1,000 donation as the class gift instead of giving a traditional one to the medical school.

Heck said he advised Weeks and Lim to be prepared to live in an isolated environment, but also encouraged them to learn something new about themselves and reflect on their profession.

"They're both remarkable young people," he said. "They are struck with the importance of their work and that cannot be emphasized enough."

In terms of expectations, Weeks and Lim said they are trying to remove all pre-conceived notions and be open-minded about the differences in culture.

"We aren't experts on their lives," Lim said. "Our idea of well-being is not necessarily the same as theirs."

Shoulder to Shoulder has worked more than two decades in the poorest areas of Honduras, providing health services for the region.

"Poor people need an advocate," said Heck, who founded the organization in 1989. "They need someone to stand up for them more than ever right now."

For more information about the trip or group, visit www.shouldertoshoulder.org.

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