

## Experience in India strengthens student's dedication to service

Improving health care delivery systems and addressing broad public health issues are noble goals, but fulfilling them requires a sharp eye for opportunities and the initiative to pursue them.

Case in point: Luke Rothermel, a fourth-year student in the M.D./M.P.H. dual-degree program.

Rothermel entered the program with a strong desire to make a difference, both by caring for individuals and enhancing the quality of care for entire patient populations. He had completed medical service missions to Mexico and Honduras as an undergraduate, and midway through his fourth year of medical school, he was eager to apply his training with another experience abroad, preferably in a rural area in a developing country.

He found his opportunity, of all places, during a theater production in Dayton.

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Flipping through the playbill, he discovered a note about a patron with a familiar name: Rajesh K. Soin. The note mentioned that the renowned business leader, former university trustee, and benefactor of the WSU Raj Soin College of Business, had recently completed the



construction of a new hospital in India in the agricultural state of Haryana.

Intrigued by the coincidence, Rothermel contacted Soin to learn more about the hospital. Soin appreciated Rothermel's interest and offered to sponsor him for a five-week trip to study public health conditions and serve alongside medical personnel at the Sukhdev Raj Soin Hospital, named after Soin's late father.

From the moment he arrived in India, Rothermel said, "everything was beyond expectations."

The teeming crowds and ceaseless activity of New Delhi, the need among farmers and villagers living near the

remote hospital, and the dedication of the medical professionals striving to meet that need made an immediate and unforgettable impression. Perhaps most striking, though, was the warmth and enthusiasm Rothermel encountered at every turn.

"The hospitality of the people is overwhelming," Rothermel said. "To walk into a place and be regarded so highly, knowing that I'm not really bringing much, especially compared to what they're bringing each other," was deeply moving.

He was a guest at countless meals, several weddings, and the vibrant, three-day festival of Holi, which essentially shut

down the hospital and most of the surrounding region. Notably, he was welcomed with such zeal not because he was a foreigner, a physician in training, or even a volunteer, but simply due to his honored status as a guest.

“This is the culture,” he explained. “This is how people care for one another in rural India.”

Despite their infectious joy and community spirit, however, local residents also struggle with serious challenges, including significant barriers to adequate health care.

Even so, Rothermel said, “the doctors who have committed to work there, the staff who are working there, and the purpose upon which the hospital was established really transcend the challenges.”

He found his temporary colleagues’ ability to make a difference for patients, and whole communities, both inspiring and humbling.

“I don’t know if I can do what they do,” he admitted. “It’s just such a large undertaking. But without a doubt, I want to emulate these people and work in a setting that offers better care to people who don’t have many options.”

In fact, Rothermel is already encouraging his fellow students to join him for a return trip in the coming year.

“My hope would be to bring other medical students and build a relationship with the hospital,” he said. He would like to establish an enduring connection “for the sake of training students, and also to bring public health and medical initiatives to support the hospital.”

Beyond any educational or service opportunities, though, Rothermel knows the most powerful and lasting impact of such an experience will likely be personal.

“I have so many relationships from this trip,” he said, “people I would never have met otherwise and who have really enriched me in incredible ways.”**VS**



In addition to working and learning at the Sukhdev Raj Soin Hospital in India’s Haryana state, Luke Rothermel had many opportunities to enjoy the “overwhelming” hospitality of his hosts and experience local customs and culture.

