

Students Volunteer in Africa

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With a suitcase full of much-needed medical supplies, two Tulane students traveled 10 hours by bus this summer from the Kenyan capital of Nairobi to their host family and volunteer assignment in a rural hospital in East Africa.



Tulane students Justin Burrell, left, and Alex Evins, right, visit with a patient at Malindi District Hospital in rural Kenya during a summer volunteer experience. (Photo by Malindi District Hospital staff)

Alexander Evins, a rising senior majoring in neuroscience from New York, and Justin Burrell, a rising junior majoring in psychology from Bellmore, N.Y., spent their summer volunteering at the Malindi District Hospital in the coastal region of Kenya. Through an arrangement with Touch Africa International, the students were placed at the hospital, where they assisted with patient care and community public health education.

"We arrived to find a situation far beyond what we anticipated," Evins says. "The basic supplies which we brought ? IV fluids, gloves, masks, etc. ? were in very short supply and dispersed within minutes. This situation is not uncommon in a nation

critically short on doctors and medication.”

The Malindi District Hospital provides health care for citizens in a 250-square-mile radius, often requiring patients to walk for days to reach the facility. The hospital, staffed by a few doctors, has the capacity for 200 patients but normally houses about 350, with another 200 patients waiting outside the gates each day, the students report.

“Three to four patients sharing a bed is an everyday reality,” Evins says.

With only one operating room and one X-ray machine, patients wait days for routine tests. Power outages happen frequently, requiring surgeons to operate using flashlights. They see a variety of cases uncommon in the United States, including elephantiasis, malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, enormous hydroceles, severe gangrene and serious infections requiring months of hospitalization.

The students say one of the most memorable cases involved a man and his 6-year-old daughter, who were burned after suspected practice of black magic. The man died shortly after arriving at the hospital and the daughter sustained third-degree burns over most of her body.

Both plan to return to Africa in the future to continue their volunteer work.