



Doctor trained locally, makes a difference globally

By Doug Blackburn
Tallahassee Democrat senior writer
April 12, 2012

Imagine trying to keep track of Dr. Julie Jacobson.

During the past two weeks, Jacobson, the senior program officer in the Global Health Program at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has spent time in Haiti, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Switzerland. Oh, and don't forget to add Tallahassee to the mix. Jacobson arrived here Wednesday afternoon in advance of a noon-hour lecture she will give today at Florida State University's medical school. Without question, she chose the path less traveled after completing

the Tallahassee Memorial Family Medicine Residency Program in 1998. The University of South Florida graduate didn't enter the program at TMH the traditional way, either.

After finishing medical school at USF, Jacobson spent much of the next year in Zaire, where she was among the first wave of physicians at a Rwandan refugee camp teeming with hundreds of thousands of displaced people trying to survive without many of the basic amenities.

"There was no water, no food and there was a cholera epidemic. It led me to realize there are a lot of things we can do better to prepare for a global medical crisis," Jacobson said.

Rather than go into primary care following her residency, Jacobson took a position with the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. She spent the next seven years working on a Gates Foundation grant before taking her current position, where she manages a \$35-million grant involving some 45 projects around the world.

Jacobson believes her training at TMH was ideal for the work she does today.

"I feel my primary care training was the best background for helping to solve global health problems," she said. "With primary care, you're looking at the whole person and all kinds of context. Solving problems in global health is similar."

Jacobson stood out almost from day one during her residency, said Dr. Don Zorn, director of the program who was a faculty member when Jacobson trained here.

"You knew she was going to do something special because she was so motivated and committed to the things that she does," Zorn said. "She enriched the residency with her previous patient experience. She was dynamic in everything she did."

Jacobson's lecture at FSU — From TMH: How small town roots led to big-time solutions in global health — may make her accomplishments seem beyond reach for some students, but she wants to stress that everyone can make a difference.

"Primary care is a perfect mix and a nice skill set to bring in when addressing the problems we encounter," she said. "People think there's nothing they can do and there's no role for them, and that's simply not true. Everybody can contribute."