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A resident physician's caring perspective

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“Life as a Resident” is an article featured in the Lee County Medical Society Bulletin. Clay Duval, M.D., one of the residents in training at the Florida State University College of Medicine Family Medicine Residency Program at Lee Health, recently shared some of his unique experiences that led him to pursue a career in medicine. It is a well-written, thoughtful and inspiring perspective that we

thought was worth publishing in its entirety.

“I’ll never forget the callouses on his hands. At age 12, Chikumba was more of a man than most men will ever be. He had been welding since the age of 9 to earn enough money to buy tomatoes for his six younger brothers and sisters to eat their fill, and hopefully enough for them to sell on the street if there were any left over. He and his siblings were orphans, living in Lusaka, Zambia, in the aftermath of the AIDS epidemic that left their beloved country with one of the lowest life expectancies of the nation at the time – 38 years.

“When my wife and I left Africa that summer and returned to the United States, my heart burned with idealism and compassion. It was seared with anger at the injustices I had seen and sorrow for the pain I had witnessed. I was determined to become a physician to do my part in putting a stop to cycles of disease, suffering and death in families.

“One of the things I promised myself was that no matter how hard medical school got, and no matter how much I learned, I would never allow myself to become an arrogant, narcissistic, desensitized or cynical physician. I knew that the fissured callouses that plagued Chikumba’s hands would never form on mine in my chosen profession. What I feared most, however, was that over the course of almost a decade of medical training, such callouses would form upon my heart. That I would no longer feel the compassion I once felt. That concerns about the size of the census, the busyness of my schedule and the unending clerical and billing minutia would drown out the very thing that drove me to medicine in the first place – to provide humble, compassionate, holistic patient-centered care.

"I knew that in order to become the physician I wanted to become, I would have to surround myself with peers and mentors who had already walked that path. And I can say without reservation that here at the FSU family medicine residency program, I've found just that. I have been flabbergasted by the humility, selflessness, compassion and hopefulness of the physicians with whom I have the pleasure of working and learning. I have been inspired that so many men and women, from so many backgrounds, are united together in this place to pursue a common and noble goal – to promote health for those in our community at every stage of this journey called life. The only word that does this team justice is 'family' – for that is what we are becoming more and more each day.

"A day in the life of this family medicine resident has taught me that if we as health care providers lay aside every weight that hinders us, and instead run this race together with perseverance, there is little that will deter us. Walking alone, this journey may callous us and wear us down – but if we run it together we will make it to the finish line. For so long we've been taught that the best way to serve our communities is by using the art of medicine to serve the institution of family. What I now see is that we only reach the apex of compassionate, competent care by using the art of a family to serve the institution of medicine."

As caring people, inspiring health, Lee Health is proud to partner with Florida State University College of Medicine to help train the family medicine doctors of the future – the men and women, like Dr. Clay Duval, who heed the call to serve others with compassion, dignity and respect.