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COUPLE LEARNS LESSONS, MAKES MEMORIES, AT HOSPITAL IN THE DR

Lemoyne, Pa. September 25, 2009: Free time is something of a precious commodity for Courtney and Aaron Baldrige.

Courtney is a fourth-year medical student at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, where she's studying to become a pediatric physician. Aaron is a high-school science teacher.

So, you'd think with all of the studying and teaching, the couple would slow down and take a break this past summer.

But they had a better idea: Spend a month at the CURE Dominican Republic hospital in the city of Santo Domingo, a facility operated by nonprofit organization CURE International that provides advanced orthopedic surgical care to physically disabled children.

Turns out, they made the right choice.

"It is a very impressive hospital," said Courtney. "CURE is an organization dedicated to treating and curing children with physical disabilities in the developing world. At this facility, the patients are getting quality specialty orthopedic care that is comparable to what they would get in the United States."

The couple spent their time assisting in vastly different, but extremely important ways.

Courtney observed surgeries, participated in patient clinics and learned the ins and outs of pediatric care from the hospital's medical team.

Aaron served in various capacities, including as painter, computer trouble shooter and official photographer and videographer.

For Courtney, this was actually a return trip to the hospital. She had served there three years ago. This time, she came as a student on a medical rotation at the hospital.

Courtney said being in the hospital setting gave her professional insights in an environment few U.S. medical students get to see.

“It was an excellent opportunity to learn about the things I’m going to encounter someday as a pediatric doctor,” she explained. “I loved working with the kids and seeing their smiles. It was also interesting to observe the innovative ways in which the hospital staff used its resources to deliver quality care to its patients. I hope to apply that same creative thinking to my own professional career.”

Another highlight for Aaron and Courtney, who both speak Spanish, was the many chances to meet Dominicans. Everywhere they went, said Courtney, people greeted them with hospitality.

“I’ll never forget our visit with the family of one of our patients,” she recalled. “Their home was unbelievably small compared to a typical U.S. house, and they had very little. But they were so kind and welcoming. I felt privileged to be a part of their lives.”

Now that they are back in the hustle and bustle of their everyday Dallas lives, Courtney said that she and Aaron often think back to their summer in the D.R.

“Leaving was really hard. We miss the kids, and we miss the staff,” she said. “We have a heart for those people, and we can’t wait to go back.”

About CURE International

Founded in 1996, CURE International is the largest provider of pediatric specialty surgical care in the developing world, transforming the lives of physically disabled children and their families through medical and spiritual healing. To date, it has performed almost 70,000 surgeries and seen nearly 1,000,000 patients. Visit www.cureinternational.org for more information.

Every year, CURE International sponsors various short-term volunteer trips for medical professionals and other individuals to its 10 hospitals throughout the developing world. Since 2004, more than 2,200 volunteers like the Baldridges have served.

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