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Guatemala visit gives a new awareness to area MDs

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The new year brought a new awareness for two area doctors and their sons who traveled to Guatemala Jan. 1-9.

Dr. Gregory Young and Dr. Mark Druffner, both family doctors at Hudson Physicians and members of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, traveled to Yalpemech, Guatemala. Isaac Young, 8, and Jacob Druffner, 15, traveled with their dads.

The goal was to provide medical care to the residents of the village, which is a sister city to St. Patrick's Church.

The clinic they worked out of was a simple concrete building with two exam rooms, a waiting room, pharmacy and recovery room.

"It is run by a nun who is assisted by an LPN or RN who helps with the translating.

The team transported medical supplies, medicine school supplies and soccer balls.

"Under normal circumstances a doctor will come to the village one day a month," said Druffner. "We were looking for some mission opportunities for the future. We wanted to see if this was a good fit."

Sister Bernadette Kalscheur has been after the team for a couple of years to head south.

Once the decision to go was made, it all fell together within three months.

"We witnessed a lot of malnutrition, and it was their cold season so respiratory problems were evident," said Young.

"Common urgent care — the type of thing we take for granted — doesn't exist down there," said Druffner. "By the end of the week we had also made a number of home visits. It costs so much money to get to a hospital in a larger town, most of them do not go."

Druffner and Young have already started a list of things they need to take back down on their next trip.

The village of Yalpemech is made up of 217 families for a total of 1,500 residents, who are all resettled refugees. Most are sustainable farmers.

For Isaac and Jacob, it was a unique experience to share with their fathers. They also discovered some things about life as well.

"I liked playing football with the kids," said Isaac. After a few minutes of tossing the ball around, he said that the local kids joined in and played for a couple of hours.

"I liked the tortillas," said Isaac, who learned how they were made from scratch at one of the families visited by his dad. He also learned what a scorpion was when it climbed up the wall where he was sleeping.

For Jacob Druffner, a teenager with a different worldview than his younger counterpart, it was more of a culture shock.

"We don't have anything like that at home," said Jacob. "The people were so nice and the poverty so extreme. They were still always happy." Jacob found the two church services interesting. They hold a traditional Catholic service and one that is native.

"Now I can look at how lucky I am to be living in a place that has four seasons and to be living in a house," said Jacob. "Down there, the houses have tin roofs and may not have floors."

"A couple of things that as care providers you realize is that you have to address the needs of the patient," said Young. "The people are very poor and yet they still find hope and pride. You also realize that you can fix one problem at a time."

"The simple truth that we discovered is they do need help and hopefully we can do something long term for them," said Druffner.

