

Dr. Mónica Eneriz Wiemer '96

From Louisville to Malawi

Quite often the journey a student takes after leaving Louisville is extraordinary. One such journey is that of Mónica Eneriz Wiemer. As the child of a Mexican immigrant mother and a Hispanic and American Indian father, Mónica's desire to pursue a career in medicine was strongly shaped by her family's immigrant, working-class experience in Southern California, and the socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic barriers they encountered in accessing medical care. At Louisville, Mónica excelled as a student, enjoying especially her science and fine arts classes, as well as her time in the Explorers Club. As an undergraduate and then as a medical student at Stanford University, she focused on addressing the health needs of minority and under-served children and families. Her interest in the health needs of new immigrants led her to participate in international electives in Guatemala and Malawi to better understand the factors that impact children's health globally. This spring, she will return to Malawi to assist in a clinic once again. Mónica shared her story with the Louisville student body on February 11, 2008:

At a clinic known as St. Gabriel's, a Catholic hospital in Malawi, I will be serving some of the most needy of these people including both adults and children infected by malaria, anemia, respiratory tract infections, malnutrition, and diarrheal disease. St. Gabriel's Hospital is a rural hospital located in the central region of the country of Malawi, approximately 60 km west of Malawi's capital city of Lilongwe. As a Catholic mission hospital established in 1959 by the Congregation of Carmelite Sisters from Luxembourg, St. Gabriel's provides curative, preventative and promotive health care services to a population of approximately 205,000 people living in local villages. Almost 6,000 children were treated at the hospital in 2006, with almost half of all hospital admissions consisting of children.



Mónica at St. Gabriel's Hospital

In May, 2007, a new pediatric ward with a 100 bed capacity was constructed. My particular project is directed at addressing unmet needs for pediatric patients of the hospital. I will return in March, 2008, to do a needs-assessment of how pediatricians associated with Stanford University may partner with St. Gabriel's to help its children. The hospital staff has already expressed a great need for various supplies for the pediatric ward including equipment for assessing children, equipment for resuscitating children in respiratory distress and common supplies that we take for granted in United States hospitals. I have been fundraising to bring these supplies to the hospital and donations of any amount are always welcome.

The health challenges in Malawi are dire. Malawi is a country of about 13 million people. Almost 1/4 of all children are malnourished, and due to diseases affecting children and adults, the life expectancy of 46-47 years is one of the worst among all countries. Many people in the country still lack access to clean water and adequate sanitation. Approximately 14% of the adult population is infected with HIV/AIDS as well as an estimated 91,000 children; an estimated 550,000 children are orphaned by HIV/AIDS alone (Statistics from the World Health Organization & UNICEF).