

Jefferson College of Health Sciences nursing Where mission, medicine meet

A group from Jefferson College brought medical information to a Choctaw tribe in Mississippi.

By Amy Hanek

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Last week, Linda Rickabaugh, an associate professor in the Jefferson College of Health Sciences nursing program, led her medical team into uncharted territory.

They didn't trek to the far reaches of the North Pole or the untouched jungles along the Amazon River.

Instead, Rickabaugh and 19 others car pooled to the Choctaw Reservation a few hundred miles away in Mississippi. She said she considered this trip a special one because her medical team was the first to visit the area in 11 years.

Each Choctaw tribe member has access to health care, but cultural beliefs have become a barrier to new health information and screenings, said Curtis Stowers, a JCHS student who went on the trip. Many communities on the reservation are experiencing health care isolation and may distrust anyone trying to offer medical intervention, he said.

Rickabaugh's goal for the mission was to bridge that trust gap while educating as many people as possible. Her team of five faculty members and 14 students held health fairs throughout the week and hoped to screen at least 200 people for blood pressure, blood sugar, body mass index and dental health. She said about 150 people attended the health fairs.

Sharon Hockett, a registered nurse with the Choctaw Health Department, said she appreciated the help.

"The Jefferson College Methodist Mission team were so warm and caring, and I for one am proud to have had them visit here," she said in an e-mail.

The team also held nightly games for the children, including Ultimate Frisbee challenges and a wet-n-wild night.

Stowers said he made a special connection with the children through the events.

Rickabaugh said she and her team built a bridge of communication with the Choctaw tribe members on the reservation, but also built a love for mission work to the 14 students on the team.

Several said that this trip is just one of many that they plan to take.

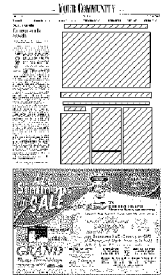
"I personally hope to continue mission work. Nothing is more rewarding, particularly when you go someplace no one has ever gone before, like Choctaw," Stowers said.

This was student Veronica Stump's second mission trip. Stump compared the type of work done in the two regions she had traveled to and marveled at how much the need in each area differed.

On her previous trip to Mexico, Stump and her teammates had concentrated on providing medical care. At the Choctaw reservation, they provided preventive education and health promotion.

She said she will always remember an apprehensive Choctaw woman who needed coaxing to attend the group's health fair.

"She was receptive to the teachings, but first she had to trust us enough to make that step inside the doors," Stump said. "This made me realize that lots of information can be available to people, but we must present it in a caring and respectful manner in order for it to be effective."





Courtesy of the Jefferson College of Health Sciences

Asmeret Yohannes, a nursing student at [Jefferson College of Health Sciences](#), is at a health fair in the village of Conehatta, Miss. Members of a mission trip from the college played with children while their caretakers went through the fair.