

Medicine With a Mission

SERVICE ABROAD SHAPES KEZIAH CROSSLEY'S APPROACH TO HEALING, EQUITY, AND CARE.

On a sunbaked church courtyard in rural El Salvador, children kicked a worn soccer ball back and forth during a midday break at a mobile medical clinic. Keziah Crossley '28 noticed almost immediately that one boy lagged behind the others. His movements were stiff. When Crossley, then a first-year medical student, knelt beside him and gently asked what was wrong, he shrugged it off. But when he turned his arm, she saw the reason: a deep, infected dog bite, swollen and draining, left untreated for days.

The boy had walked alone through the mountains to reach the clinic. His parents were working. They had no money for medicine, no supplies to clean the wound. What he did have was pain.

Within minutes, Crossley brought him to the clinic's lead physician. Antibiotics were started. The wound was cleaned and dressed. His parents were found and given supplies and instructions for follow-up care. What could have become life-threatening was stopped in its tracks.

"Moments like these," Crossley says, "are why I chose medicine, and more specifically, why I chose a path shaped by mission work—one that emphasizes presence, humility, and care for those most often overlooked."

Now a second-year medical student at the Norton College of Medicine, Crossley traces her calling not to a single experience, but to years of service that gradually transformed her understanding of what it means to heal.

That transformation began long before medical school. Growing up in Indiana, Crossley was fascinated by medicine from a young age, gravitating toward science courses and seeking out opportunities to learn more about healthcare. At Indiana University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in neuroscience, her academic



Keziah Crossley '28 caring for a baby so that the mother could be seen for her postpartum needs.

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interests deepened. But it was mission work that gave them purpose.

As an undergraduate, Crossley joined a medical brigade to Tennessee through Timmy Global Health, her first exposure to mobile clinics serving underserved communities. Schools were converted into makeshift medical centers. Ophthalmologists, dentists, surgeons, and family physicians volunteered their expertise. Medical students worked long days alongside attending physicians, providing care to patients who might otherwise go without.

What struck Crossley most was not just the need, but the generosity. "Seeing medical students give up their limited free time to serve," she recalls, "opened my eyes to the kind of physician I wanted to become." Mission work didn't feel separate from medicine, it felt central to it.

Service had always been a throughline in Crossley's life. In high school and college, she volunteered at food banks, participated in hurricane relief efforts, and eventually became president of a faith-based campus ministry. The work nurtured a sense of responsibility not just to treat illness, but to care for communities.

After graduating in 2021, Crossley took a gap year that would prove pivotal. Shortly after her family moved to Hershey, Pennsylvania, she joined a church-affiliated medical mission trip to El Salvador. Working alongside pharmacists, nurses, physician assistants, and physicians, she helped operate mobile clinics in remote villages—some accessible only after hours of travel by foot.

Patients came from all walks of life. Some had not seen a doctor in years. Others arrived with chronic conditions left unmanaged simply because care was too far away or too expensive. "Health care is a fundamental right," Crossley says. "Seeing



Crossley visits with a young child who traveled by himself to come to the clinic for the first time.

how many people lacked access made that truth impossible to ignore.”

The fact that she had limited medical experience made no difference. “Even if I was just helping patients find a seat or giving out medicine, it really touched my heart to be a part of it,” she says.

The experience was so impactful that Crossley asked to return—not for another short trip, but for five months. With the support of the local mission organization,



Crossley learned under the direction of head physician, Boris Magaña, MD, founder of the King’s Castle medical clinics.

she moved to El Salvador and spent nearly half a year assisting local physicians as clinics traveled across the country. Churches and schools became exam rooms. Care became longitudinal, with patients followed over time rather than treated once and sent away.

It was during that season that Crossley met her future husband, Quinn, on a medical mission trip in 2021. Their shared commitment to service and faith would become the foundation of their life together.

After returning to the U.S., Crossley earned a master’s degree in medical sciences at Boston University. While there, she conducted thesis research at Harvard’s Collaborative Center for X-linked Dystonia Parkinsonism (XDP) that bridges science with humanitarian goals for a rare movement disorder that disproportionately affects Filipino men. The work focused on enhancing the quality of life of XDP patients by expanding access to care, advancing cutting-edge therapeutic research, and ultimately working toward a cure. She also commissioned into the U.S. Navy Reserve Medical Corps, continuing a family legacy of military service while preparing for a future in academic medicine.

Now engrossed in the rigors of medical school, mission work remains central. During the summer after her first year at Upstate, Crossley returned to El Salvador, this time with new skills and a deeper clinical foundation. Working closely with the country’s lead clinic physician, Boris Magaña, MD, she learned to recognize

region-specific illnesses, from parasitic infections to chronic hypertension, and to understand how environment shapes disease.

“He taught me how context changes everything,” Crossley says. “You learn not just what a disease is, but why it’s happening here.”

One of the most meaningful moments came when a child was diagnosed with a rare parasitic infection that could have become life-threatening if left untreated. When the child’s mother mentioned another child in the village with similar symptoms, the clinic arranged transportation so both could be evaluated and treated. For Crossley, the moment illustrated how medical care can ripple outward, saving not just one life, but potentially many.

At Upstate, Crossley continues to integrate mission-driven values into her academic work. Her dermatology research focuses on how skin conditions present in women of color, examining disparities in diagnosis and treatment timelines—work that echoes lessons learned abroad about equity, access, and attentive care.

As she looks ahead to clinical rotations and residency—potentially in emergency medicine, general surgery, or family medicine—Crossley remains grounded in the experiences that first shaped her path. She and her husband hope to continue returning to El Salvador each year, with a long-term vision of dedicating their lives to global medical mission work.

“Medical school can be a lot at times, but I feel fortunate being able to learn to help others and pour into their lives in a way that can add quality and value. That’s something I’m very grateful to be able to learn and do.”