Most of us started the long, often arduous journey to become dermatologists for one reason: to help people. However, with the various complicated steps we take on a daily basis, like learning the billing, dealing with insurance companies, and memorizing the board fodder, we often forget the simple, true motivation behind what we do. I feel fortunate that my dermatology program through Western University/College Medical Center continues to instill the spirit of altruism by providing us the opportunity to serve underserved people in the global community.

Our dermatology program is the only osteopathic dermatology program in the state of California. Historically it has been led by Dr. David Horowitz, and now is being continued by Dr. Navid Nami. From day one of our dermatology residency, Dr. Horowitz reminded us of why we are doing this. He gave us a list of tips that successful people use on a daily basis to not only be successful in our dermatology residencies but also in every aspect of our lives so that hopefully, we can represent our osteopathic communities well.

One of the major lessons Dr. David taught all our residents is the importance of caring for people, not only in our local communities but also in every aspect of our lives so that hopefully, we can represent our osteopathic communities well.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Here, we created our own clinic using an elementary school and saw over 1,100 patients within a week's time. Every day, we would walk into a chaotic scene where people were lined up for hours just to see us. It was an extremely rewarding experience to end each day knowing we had served each person who had waited to the best of our abilities. Along the way, we picked up some of the local language, Amharic, which to this day we try to use with the occasional Ethiopian patient we may encounter.

We also spent time volunteering at an HIV-dermatology clinic, as well as a leprosy clinic. Here we saw HIV-related dermopathy that we had only read about and were able to learn about the various stages of leprosy first-hand, as well as see the local approach to diagnosis. We saw interesting pathology, including a hemangiopericytoma on an infant’s hand, X-linked ichthyosis and Madura foot. It was an amazing experience for all of us because it was the first time any of us residents had been to Africa and we were awarded the chance to meet so many interesting local people.

My second year of residency, we went to the Dominican Republic, where we served a small community in San Francisco de Marcos. Here, we traveled with the Global Health Organization and saw mainly dermatology but also primary care patients with the help of our multispecialty team. We treated a range of conditions, from mundane conditions like verruca, acne, melasma
Our dermatology team in the Dominican Republic, led by our fearless leader in altruism, Dr. David Horowitz.

and photodermatitis to less-common entities like xeroderma pigmentosum. We also performed house calls in the local community, where we treated severe decubitus ulcers and performed hospice care.

One of the best parts of our experience was that we were able to further develop our Spanish-speaking skills by talking to patients, as well as with the help of the volunteer Dominican students who translated. Through our interaction with these Dominican students, we were able to not only have a better cultural experience but also give back further to the community as mentors, which is a role we treasure to date.

Our international dermatology experiences are one of the most cherished memories that I will take away as I graduate from residency in the next few months. We were able to not only travel to new and exotic locations but also reach many people and provide them with the medical aid they have needed for years. Dr. Horowitz’s ambition to treat patients internationally has only grown stronger as he has retired as program director; with his direction, we continue to be excited about serving abroad. We are currently planning our next medical mission to Guatemala and look forward to again embracing the philanthropic reason why we all joined this profession in the first place.