

Optometry Students Provide Eye Care for Jamaicans

Dr. Raymond Pellowe, University of Waterloo optometry professor, spent six days in Jamaica last fall delivering 260 pairs of glasses prescribed by a team of UW students who visited the island during the summer. The students spent a month there conducting more than 1,500 eye examinations.

This was the first time since 1976 a team of UW optometry students has visited the Caribbean. Previously, the Canadian International Development Agency supported such visits annually, however CIDA has since changed its priorities.

The project this year was initiated by Lions clubs in Jamaica who raised the air fare for the three students forming the team and provided lodging for them and a supervisor for one month. Air Canada provided a return air fare for one

supervisor. The Jamaicans are concerned because there are simply no vision care services available on many parts of the island, especially for low-income groups. Indeed, in recent years, statistics indicate, there has been a reduction in the number of health care practitioners available throughout Jamaica.

"The trip was a wonderful morale booster for the students," Dr. Pellowe says. "Some of the people our students helped were so grateful they became quite emotional . . . that is when they learned what a difference good vision can make."

The students were paid a stipend for their efforts. The money for these stipends came from donations from Ontario Lions clubs, private individuals and other sources. The cost of the glasses Dr. Pellowe delivered was also paid for, in large mea-

sure, by donations from Lions clubs and other individuals.

A Trenton optometrist, Dr. L.A. Coward, supervised the students during the early part of their month. Dr. William Coomb, Toronto, was with them for the balance. Neither optometrist accepted any pay for this service. In addition, Dr. Coomb paid his own way to Jamaica. The students were: Andy Patterson, Ottawa; Steve Matthew, Chatham, Ont., and Gerald Leinweber, Jasper, Alta.

Dr. Pellowe says Jamaicans have urged UW's school of optometry to send another team of students this year. Whether this happens depends on the availability of adequate funding. The best solution, said Dr. Pellowe, would be to see more Caribbeans trained in optometry abroad so they can return home to practice.



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