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Care and Compassion: The Next Generation

Husband and wife Nicolas Cadet and Ji Wei Yang, both MDCM'12, grew up in families where serving others was simply a way of life.

Yang, a 2009 recipient of the Dr. Clarke K. McLeod Research Bursary, says that her parents dedicated themselves to their church community. "They were always generous with time and resources." She was regularly recruited by them to help out, so it's not lost on her that they gave her the name Ji Wei, which is Mandarin for helper and protector.

She also praises her in-laws for their good work. A doctor and pastor, they eased the settlement in Quebec for many new arrivals from Haiti in the 1970s. "My mother-in-law would provide advice for physical health and my father-in-law would provide advice for spiritual health."

At the age of 11, Cadet would prepare PowerPoint presentations for community health workshops given by his mother who, along with his father, ingrained in him important philosophies: "They showed us that we should always treat people with love and compassion, and to be generous with our time and our knowledge."

Yang and Cadet see medicine as a tool to apply their parents' teachings. Those shared values and their common profession have made them a force for community health and international medicine.

The two have organized several medical and health education clinics in Montreal. In 2014 and 2015, they took that care abroad to Haiti, where they led glaucoma screening missions for some of the country's most vulnerable citizens. While there, Cadet also conducted eye surgeries and the two organized symposiums for local doctors.

Cadet, who trained in ophthalmology at Université de Montréal and is currently on a fellowship in ocular plastic

surgery at McMaster University, treated hundreds of people during those two visits. He remembers one particular story of a bright 15-year-old girl who had been labelled legally blind and was unable to afford glasses.

"I went there with boxes full of glasses. When she tried one pair on, she went to 20/20 vision. It was just simple myopia," he recalls. "She was really emotional. She said 'I can now realize my dream of becoming a doctor.' That really touched me."

For Yang, an endocrinologist and thyroid fellow at the University of Toronto, her time in Haiti gave her a perspective on the difficulties that can result from a lack of access to health care. "These people had such simple problems but because they didn't have any treatment, we saw complications in late stage that we don't see in North America."

Cadet also remembers being moved by the sound of his wife speaking to a patient in Creole, the language of his Haitian-born father. It was a nice coda from decades earlier, when his mother, a white Québécoise, learned to speak Creole to treat Montreal Haitians.

Cadet made sure to get to know local doctors and specialists and referred patients to them. He was also able to recruit doctors from Montreal, some of whom taught surgical techniques to the local specialists.

While they are currently working in Hamilton and Toronto respectively, Cadet and Yang plan to get back to their health fairs for glaucoma, diabetes, hypertension and thyroid disease in Montreal, educating and treating vulnerable populations.

The mission of care and compassion, which both sets of parents began, continues. 🐦