

Doug Barker: Five Decades as a Global PA

By: Don Pedersen, PhD, PA

Doug Barker entered the 8th class of the University of Utah Physician Assistant Program (UPAP), formerly the Utah MEDEX Demonstration Project, in 1977. I was fortunate to be in the same class. Doug came to the U with a wealth of clinical experience, I came with degrees but no practical clinical experience. I benefited greatly from his knowledge and skills with impromptu sessions on suturing, casting, lab testing, etc. gained from his time as an EMT in the busy ER of one of our local Salt Lake City Hospitals. Several of the ER physicians at Holy Cross Hospital convinced Doug that his next career choice should be to attend the new MEDEX program at the U and further his medical education by becoming a primary care PA. As a friend and colleague, I have followed Doug's career over nearly five decades. Doug's clinical year was spent in Moab, Utah with Dr. Paul Mayberry, a dedicated family physician and surgeon. Placing clinical year students with "full service" family physicians in an apprenticeship model was the norm for the eight MEDEX programs across the country. We both survived the gauntlet of PA education and were hired on with our respective precepting physicians – Doug in Moab and me in Blackfoot, Idaho. I moved from Blackfoot to Salt Lake City to become PA program faculty at the University of Utah and Doug



Peace Corps volunteer Doug Barker, PA training Clinical Officers in Nakuru, Kenya in the late 1970s.



Doug met his wife 'Noi' at MSF Site II North Khmer refugee camp.

went on to the Peace Corps – a dream of his for many years. This is where Doug's remarkable story as a "global PA" begins. He initially was posted to Nakuru, Kenya on the banks of Lake Nakuru with its remarkable flocks of pink flamingos. He began teaching registered clinical officers (RCOs) as a Peace Corps "Medical Education Tutor". His specialty became OB/GYN out of necessity due to the overwhelming demand for obstetrical care in this resource-poor country. Through his teaching and clinical care in OB, Doug spent 2 memorable years teaching and being "adopted" by a Kikuyu family. On

a trip with Doug and Noi, his wife, to Kenya and Tanzania in the early 2000, we met many individuals at the training facility that remembered Doug and the time he spent teaching there in 1980s.

After his early African Peace Corps experience, Doug moved on to refugee camps and became one of the main health and safety professionals for some 70,000 Khmer and Afghan refugees - first along the Thai/Cambodian border and then the

Afghanistan/Pakistan border. This

is where Doug learned the importance of the basic public health issues of safe water and sanitation in resource-poor countries. This is also where he met Noi who was helping as a Thai pharmacy technician at the MSF (Doctors Without Borders) refugee hospital in the Thailand camp.



Doug caring for village children near Kopi Village, Papua New Guinea

Doug went on to work for multinational corporations around the world – including Chad, Sudan, Niger, Guinea, Mozambique, American Samoa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, Canada, and Kazakhstan. In these work situations he oversaw the health and safety of the

indigenous and expatriate workforce at the various project sites, most often in very remote (and sometimes dangerous) settings.

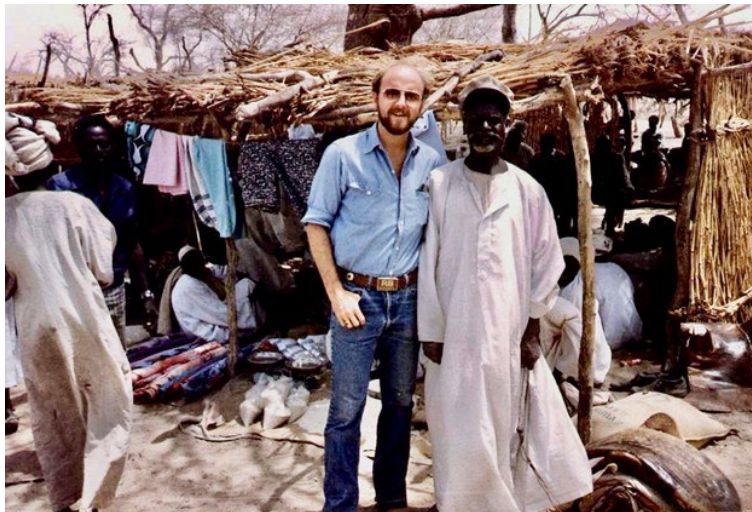


Doug in his OPD pediatric "fever room" at the Thai/Cambodian Refugee Camp.

Treating non-employee villagers in the project areas was always part of Doug's operational plan – which often meant helicopter evacuations of village women in obstructed labor or a spear wound from a skirmish between warring clans to distant surgical hospitals (at the expense of the company). In these diverse settings, over

some 35 years, he would also become involved with various humanitarian outreach efforts (as part of the company's "corporate social responsibility" effort) - assisting in the areas of community healthcare, public health, and the empowerment of women in the mostly patriarchal societies. In the mid-1990s, Doug was awarded the PARagon International

Humanitarian PA of the Year by the American Academy of PAs. It was while working in Papua New Guinea (PNG), in the late 1990s that Doug and I co-founded the international clinical student rotational exchanges for the University of Utah Physician Assistant Program (UPAP). Over his twelve-year tenure in PNG, he exposed dozens of clinical year UPAP students to the provision of healthcare in resource-poor countries, as well as helping students understand the unique features of occupational medicine and safety within a corporate framework while in a distant “triple canopy” rainforest or a sand dune desert setting halfway around the world. UPAP was benefited greatly by meeting and working with indigenous “PA-Like” health care providers in other countries. The health extension officers (HEOs) from PNG were able to partake in a 4-week clinical rotation in Salt Lake City. While working with PAs and PA students, the HEOs would be exposed to “Western style” medicine and bring back knowledge and skills to their country. With Doug’s vision and the help of Noi, the UPAP international program was expanded to Thailand, where students continue to be exposed to experts in tropical and infectious diseases and to another PA analogue - the Burma Medic - in the refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border. These “life-changing” experiences are coordinated by Noi and have been ongoing for



Doug with patient at Sudanese market.

the past 20 years. The curriculum that Doug created for the Thailand International Elective (TIE) exists today as the “gold standard” for training students for global service. While in Kazakhstan as medical director of a major multinational company, Doug was able to hire and train Feldsher’s (the historical PA analog trained in Russia). He also arranged to have some of them visit us at UPAP for classroom and clinical experiences, introducing our students to this PA-Like provider.

Doug has been an outstanding role model of the US PA, introducing our profession to countless individuals in numerous countries over the course of his decades long career. He continues lately as a US-based PA, working closer to home on the east coast where he is enjoying time with his family – Noi, their boys Juriaan, Ben and Shane and more recently their grandchildren.