Dear Colleagues:

In today’s global society, it is essential for health care students and faculty to have the opportunity to experience firsthand the people and health care challenges of other countries. I have been fortunate in my medical career to take part in more than a dozen medical missions to Mexico, the Philippines, Uganda and elsewhere. This last April, I traveled with a team of health care professionals to the mountains of Guatemala to provide much needed surgical services.

We are fortunate to have an outstanding Office of International Programs here at KU Medical Center to help facilitate international experiences for our students, faculty and staff. Under the direction of Kimberly Connelly, we are seeing an increase in the number of students and faculty participating in international rotations and missions, and the office is doing everything it can to make sure the experience for them is a safe and satisfying one.

One of our most successful international elective rotations for students is the Robinson Scholars Program, which awards students in our Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Health Professions scholarships to travel for four weeks to complete clinical elective rotations at Christian Medical College in Vellore, India. The program was started in 2006 by Dr. Mani Mani, a professor emeritus in general surgery at the School of Medicine. Since then 62 students have been selected as scholars including ten students who have traveled to India through the Robinson Scholars Program so far in 2014.

Of course, participating in the Robinson Scholars Program is just one of many international elective rotation options available to our students. KUMC has partnerships with 20 sites around the world, from Australia to Zambia. And while traveling to a foreign country can be a challenging experience, our international office does everything to help make the process smoother for our students and faculty, tackling everything from securing visas and the proper insurance to holding workshops to prepare students for immersion in a new culture. So far in 2014, the office has facilitated international travel for nearly 100 KUMC students and faculty.

The Office of International Programs also helps international students, scholars and employees when they come to our campus. We attract gifted students from around the world, and we currently host 160 students every year from other countries training here at KU Medical Center. Some are here for their entire health care education, but others come in for short clinical rotations. We also sponsor nearly 100 Exchange Visitors and 125 international employees. Connelly and her staff work overtime to make sure our international population has the right visas and paperwork to make their transition to our country a smooth one.

Our Office of International Programs is always looking for new and better ways to improve the international experience for our students and faculty. Ideas include developing a more comprehensive curriculum students could take before an international rotation and an international institute or center where we could host more activities on our campus.

The vast majority of our domestic students will end up practicing health care in the United States, and many right here in Kansas. But that doesn’t detract from the importance of understanding the relationship between health care and society in other cultures. That is why the work being done by our Office of International Programs will continue to be an increasingly important part of KUMC’s strategic plan.

7 August 2014