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UINTAH BASIN HEALTHCARE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## PRESS RELEASE

### Dr. John Wells, Leaving a Legacy of Compassionate Service

**February 17, 2017:** It's been five and a half years since Uintah Basin Healthcare gained a new Family Practice Physician by the name of Dr. John Wells. It didn't take long at all to realize that we had made a good hire. A loving husband, a father of six, and a physician that can only be described as someone who is in it for the right reason... because he cares about people.

Many community members have learned of Dr. Well's compassion for his patients and his desire to make a difference in our community. What some may not know is that his efforts extend far beyond the Uintah Basin. Dr. Wells has taken ten medical missions to Honduras to provide services to those in need, in addition to one trip to La Paz, Bolivia to work in an orphanage with his wife Emilee and another rotation to Cochabamba, Bolivia during residency to work in a hospital. On February 25, 2017, Dr. Wells will leave for his 11<sup>th</sup> medical mission to Honduras. Traveling with him will be his 13-year old daughter Olivia Wells and 12-year old daughter Naomi Wells as well as his brother Chris Wells. Dr. Wells is also excited to bring along with him several community members from the Basin including Dan Robison DDS along with his 14-year old son Joshua and 12-year old daughter Olivia, Jessica Bastian (Dental Assistant), Agree Bingham (Dental Assistant), Esperanza Soto (Dental Translator), Tanya Boren RN (Uintah Basin Healthcare Hospice Director of Nursing), Corinne Ketterer RN (Uintah Basin Healthcare Hospice Nurse), and Mike Labrum (General Manager L&L Motors) along with his 16-year old son Brock.

Dr. Well's love for humanitarian work comes from his parent's strong example of service, partnered with his love for Latin America after serving an LDS mission to Argentina. During John's first year of medical school, he was selected out of 20 applicants to be one of two first-year medical students to travel with Dr. Richard Paat with the University of Toledo group. He has continued with his Honduras trips almost every year since then.

It is evident that humanitarian work is something that Dr. Well's family is committed to. "It all started with my wife, Emilee, and I living in Bolivia. She has been such a good sport, even riding with me in the luggage compartment of a bus overnight from LaPaz to Cochabamba, Bolivia. During medical school and residency when she never saw me, was pregnant or had a new baby she was still supportive of me going. My mother and father have both been to Honduras with me. Two years ago, I was able to take my oldest daughter, Olivia, and Emilee for the first time and then Olivia also went this past trip as well," Wells said.

The medical care provided in Honduras is very different from the care Dr. Wells provides in his clinic here in our community each day. In Honduras Dr. Wells sees things you never see here – many different parasites, infectious disease, tropical disease and chronic issues affected by a lack of medical care. On his drives to the remote villages he will pass mothers walking with their children for miles down a dirt road before sunrise to the site where they will wait in line to get their prescriptions and start the walk back home in hopes of arriving before dark. The daily physical labor there is grueling on their bodies, so there are many locals with joint complaints. They use wood to cook and to provide warmth, so although very few smoke, there are many respiratory issues. Parasites are a big problem, as they don't have access to clean water. Many patients come in with scabies, which is a skin parasite that causes severe itching. Dental care is a major concern. An average young adult has had many of their teeth pulled. Many children have rotten teeth, due to lack of care and drinking large amounts of soda (which is safer than drinking the water they have access to).

Honduras is a very poor country with limited resources. Dr. Wells tells a story where he took a picture of a whiteboard in a classroom showing the past, present and future. The drawing summarized the lifestyle of the local people. The "past" had an illustration that showed they were little and didn't go to school, the "present" showed they had a backpack and could read, and the "future" showed a man with a big hat, a hoe, and a machete going to work in the fields. That is what they have to look forward to. It is what is available to them. Most of the women work just as hard in the home with the children, cooking, cleaning, growing food and raising animals.

Living in such conditions with lack of available medical care creates an environment where many locals don't live past the age of 60. Their hospital covers a very large area with many very remote towns and they do an amazing job considering the limited resources they have. However, these medical missions definitely make a lasting impact.

A typical clinic day is vastly different from a day in the clinic here in the Uintah Basin. Here, we may get a little frustrated if we are running a few minutes late to an appointment, or if we are required to wait in a comfortable waiting room for thirty minutes before our appointment on a busy day. In Interviewing Dr. Wells, his stories put into perspective how blessed we really are. In telling of his medical mission experiences, Dr. Wells stated "We were on an old Bluebird school bus and the clutch went out so we pushed it to the side of the road and we got another bus. The next day they fixed it and we were going up to a town 2.5 hours up in the mountains. We were going up a very steep, windy road. Along the way, we passed a plaque on the side of a road that commemorated a busload of people who had fallen off the edge in some bad weather. It wasn't super comforting. On the way up, our drive line snapped and we were stuck. A group of 5 of us, including Emilee and Olivia (my wife and daughter), grabbed some supplies and started walking up the road towards the village which was another two miles away. A big truck hauling coffee beans stopped and let us hop in the back. By time we got there, the people at the site had given out 600 tickets to get in the gate for medical care. An additional 200 people were waiting outside of the gates, and we were starting late because of our bus troubles. We had a large team of 50... 30 of which were medical students, several physicians and residents, 2 dentists, a few pharmacy and nursing students, and a few non-medical volunteers. My daughter, Olivia, was the only youth along. When she saw the enormous crowd her eyes got really big. We worked darn hard, used headlamps when it got dark, and saw every person that day."

The care provided by Dr. Wells and other volunteers typically includes primary care with some minor surgery and dental care. There is no electricity at most sites, so some work is done outside in better lighting conditions. Common treatments include joint injections and treatment for injuries and burns. They also treat cases of high blood pressure, diabetes and depression. Often, they try to provide at least a 6-month supply of medication for those patients with chronic issues. They provide deworming medication to almost everyone that comes through and vitamins to kids and pregnant or breastfeeding women. If there is a case that needs surgery with long-term follow-up, the patient may be referred to the Lions Club to arrange for care at the hospital in La Esperanza or they may coordinate with a specialty team that will be coming in. The dentists are a newer addition to the volunteer team and have primarily done extractions due to lack of electricity, but they are starting to incorporate preventative teaching and fluoride varnish.

Over the years, Dr. Wells has touched many lives and created some memories that he will never forget. He recalls treating a 65-year old gentleman who he treated as a first-year medical student. He had right shoulder pain. As Dr. Wells gathered his history he learned that he had worked in the fields swinging a machete since he was 12 years old, six days a week, 10-12 hours a day. There was no question as to why this man's shoulder hurt. Two years later Dr. Wells was back in the area with his father and he saw the same patient who remembered him and the pills he had given him two years prior. The man thanked him for making such a difference in his life. The pills were simply ibuprofen, but they had helped him to keep working, which there can be a matter of life or death.

The team takes all the supplies and medications with them in checked army duffel bags. Medications and supplies come from fundraisers and donations. The UBMC Pharmacy has made donations for badly needed medications which serves several hundred patients. This year Uintah Basin Healthcare made a \$1,000 donation to provide 100 water filters. The team will take 300 filters with them in total. Each filter supplies clean water to a family for 10 years. The supplies and medications are all given at no charge to those who go through the clinic.

The Lions Club in La Esperanza makes the in-country arrangements for the volunteers. Two of the Lions Club Members (Rene and Mene Ratliff) are a husband and wife; he is the general surgeon at the local hospital and she is the pediatrician. They take great care of the team. When the team completes their mission, any supplies or medications left over get donated to the hospital there.

**"It's hard to leave, knowing these people depend on your care.** We try to do as much as we can in the time we are there, but we want the care to continue. Part of trying to make a more long-term difference is our water filter project. We leave water filters for the schools, community centers and some families that are selected each time. Providing clean water probably makes a bigger long-term difference than anything else we do. We also choose three people in each town to be trained as a "health promoter". We leave them with supply kits and medications. They attend training classes taught by the physicians and medical students during the morning and then in the afternoon they work alongside the doctors on the team so they can train with us. We teach them how to use a stethoscope and blood pressure cuff, how to do an exam, what is normal and what is not. Each year we return we get them back if we are in the same village, restock their kit, retrain and hear about some of the experiences they've had since we were there last, which are often amazing. Every new village we go to we start the training again. We leave them with a copy of "Where There is No Doctor" to reference. **Each time I leave I know I will go back; it is a part of who I am.**" stated Wells.

Interviewing Dr. Wells was an honor. He is an inspiration to those around him and someone that is committed to making a difference. He has sincere compassion that he has carried with him through life, and a desire to truly serve others. If you speak to his clinic patients or his hospice patients, they share a high level of respect for him. We are honored to have Dr. Wells on our team at Uintah Basin Healthcare, and very much look forward to hearing about his latest adventure in serving the people of Honduras.

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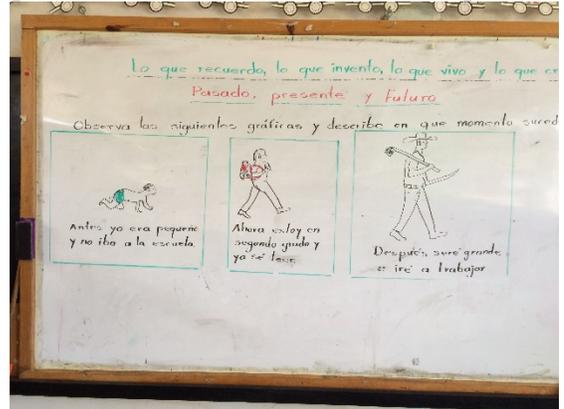
Dr. John Wells teaching locals how to use donated water filters.



Dr. John Wells listening to child.



Dr. John Wells teaching a medical student an abdominal exam on a local.



A local school board showing the past, present and future.



Dr. Wells wife (Emilee) and daughter (Olivia)



Old Ankle Injury



Tooth Decay



Broken Arm



Burn