



Duke University Medical Center

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DURHAM, N.C.

Duke physiologist says

Cultural exchange with third world needed

By David Williamson

"The level of ignorance in this country about Africa is quite fantastic," said Dr. George Somjen, a professor of physiology at Duke. "Most of us just don't know anything about the place, about the people and about the problems they face."

Wishing to find out more about Africa himself and to be useful at the same time, Somjen spent last semester teaching neurophysiology to medical and dental students at Nigeria's Ibadan University.

He returned to this country not as an expert on the African continent, but miles ahead of those who form their impressions from spotty news stories and stereotypic movies.

For those who can't quite remember, Nigeria is a former British crown colony that achieved its independence in 1960 and suffered through one of recent history's bloodiest civil wars some 10 years ago. Its estimated 55-80 million people occupy lands roughly six times the size of North Carolina just north of the equator on the Atlantic Ocean.

"I found the great majority of the people there to be charming, welcoming, curious and talented," Somjen said in an interview. "There are a few who are genuinely hostile to Europeans, but I found much less hostility than I had expected."

The strides Nigerians have made

toward educating their young people have been enormous, Somjen said, especially considering that until 30 years ago, there were no universities in the country at all.

Ibadan was the first of the seven universities currently operating in Nigeria, he said, and there are plans to build another five. Ibadan is also the second oldest institution of higher learning in all of black Africa.

Classes too large

"Money, of course, is always a problem, but I believe the largest problem they face in education is the imbalance between the number of teachers and the number of students," the scientist explained.

As an example, he cited his own neurophysiology class that contained some 280 students, 220 of whom were medical students.

While the classes aren't as large as those at some Latin American schools, they are still far too big for the kind of individualized instruction that the students really need, Somjen said.

Wanted to know more students

During his six months at Ibadan, the Duke professor, who was born in

Budapest, Hungary, and has lived in Holland and New Zealand, got to know a few of his students, but not as many as he would have liked.

A two-month student strike to protest a tripling of fees by the military government occurred during his stay and compounded the problem of sheer numbers.

Students, incidentally, enter medical school there at age 18 directly after high school. They are taught in the English method which emphasizes laboratory classes and more detailed instruction in the basic sciences.

Three large nationalities

Like many emerging nations, Nigeria has yet to complete the kind of unification that more industrialized countries enjoy.

There are three large nationalities—the Ibo, the Housa and the Yoruba—and 30 or so smaller ethnic groups, each with its own language, dress, customs, dances, traditions and religion. These differences, which the official English language attempts to bridge, still retard progress in education, public health and commerce.

"Ethnic differences mean a lot less at a
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Better family physician training goal of Kellogg grant

In an effort to improve residency training available to family physicians, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Mich., has awarded a four-year, \$645,932 grant to the Duke-Watts Family Medicine Program.

During the first year, the grant will be used to sharpen the teaching, research and administrative skills of the program faculty, according to Dr. James Bobula, chief of the program's Education and Evaluation Section.

During the remaining three years, Kellogg funds will support workshops and other educational activities for family medicine faculty from across the United States, said Bobula, an assistant professor of community and family medicine.

Joint effort

The Family Medicine Program is directed by Dr. William J. (Terry) Kane. It is a joint effort of Duke's Department of Community and Family Medicine and the Durham County Hospital Corporation.

Located in a new 23,000-square-foot building on the grounds of Durham County General Hospital, the program serves as a model family practice, a training center for 39 Duke residents and

a major health care provider for more than 12,000 Durham-area residents.

"When family medicine was established as a specialty in the early 1960s, family doctors who usually had no experience as

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HIP HIP HOORAY!—Seven-year-old Jay Winston reflects the sentiments of the sign on the window of the pediatric playroom which says, "Hip, Hip, Hooray! It's Christmas!" Meanwhile, 8-year-old Vester ("Peanut") Streater flashes his season's cheeriest grin while clowning



around with a Christmas wreath. The wreath was a gift to pediatric inpatients made from quilted squares by pediatric outpatients. Winston is a pediatric outpatient and Streater is a patient on Howland Ward. (Photos by Parker Herring)



No Intercom next week

Because of the holidays, *Intercom* will not be published next week. The final issue for 1978 will appear Dec. 29. A special Christmas issue of *Heartbeat* will be distributed Dec. 21. For more holiday news, see page 2.