

Essence of Humanity Award
Capitol Area, United Way
April 24, 2007

Lawrence E. Dodds, M. D., M.P.H.

Dr. Lawrence Dodds, of Liverpool, PA, retains the amazing dedication to care for others which has typified his life of service as a physician. In his ninth year with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and confined to a wheelchair, he continues to work full-time as a volunteer for a non-profit organization devoted to the care of humanitarian, cross-cultural workers. He teaches, coaches, counsels, provides medical consultations, and carries on a worldwide network of communication. Everyone who knows him is inspired by his cheerfulness, upbeat attitude, and his "make-do" approaches to his many physical limits. Once able to fly jets and helicopters, do surgery, and build furniture, he now has lost the use of limbs and even fingers. After using a chop stick in his teeth for months, he now types with an "eye-gaze" computer and makes phone calls using a breath of air. He keeps in touch with his former graduate students, whom he has taught in about thirty countries, and with missionaries and others around the globe. His ability to reframe situations and produce a new solution has enabled him to adapt to continuous physical losses for over eight years with ALS.

Dr. Dodds' wife, Lois, a psychologist, licensed counselor, writer, and professor, estimates he has given away over \$2,000,000 worth of medical care during his thirteen years in Peru and twelve years as a volunteer on the staff of Heartstream Resources, Inc. During most of his professional life he has received a minimal living allowance or no salary at all. His dedication, self-sacrifice, enthusiasm, and high energy continues to inspire many people. When he spoke to medical students at Hershey Medical School last spring, both faculty and students found it inspiring—one said, "You and your story are the most inspiring things I have encountered during medical school!"

Dr. Dodds trained as a young man to fulfill the vision of his life purpose, discovered at age eight when he read the biography of David Livingstone, a Scottish physician who went to Africa in the early 1900s. After attending medical school at University of Southern California (USC), Dr. Dodds served an internship at Huntington Hospital in Pasadena, CA, and was chief resident at Ventura County Hospital in California during his training in family practice. He wavered once during this time, typified by 120-hour work weeks (three hundred beds and seven residents!) when he applied to return to the U.S. Army in the Space, Aviation and Astronaut programs in which he had trained earlier. After tough considerations, and down to the last signature for re-enrollment, he persevered by sticking with his childhood call of serving the poor.

After a tour of duty as the flight surgeon for the flight detachment of President Lyndon Johnson, Dr. Dodds was assigned to Viet Nam. There he took care of Vietnamese villagers during his spare hours serving as a flight surgeon with a flight battalion in Quin Yon. He found it very fulfilling to care for the people who had little or no care, finding courage to treat cholera, plague, and other contagious diseases.

Before going to Peru to serve the native peoples of the Amazon region, Dr. Dodds became the only full-time emergency room physician which Ventura County Hospital had ever hired. He also directed the County's Drug Rehabilitation Service. He loved the challenge of facing any problem which came through the door, and he found great fulfillment in caring for patients in crisis.

Dr. Dodds, his wife Lois, and their three young children, then ages four, six and eight years old, spent six months training in jungle life in Southern Mexico. They learned to live a simple life, building their own

shelter, mud stove, furniture, and household items. The goal was to be prepared for the worst that could happen and to be able to sustain themselves should they crash in the jungle or be lost. During this time Dr. Dodds trained other candidates for overseas jungle service in basic medical care, such as giving injections, pulling teeth, and stitching up wounds. The first night at camp their son David, aged eight, almost died of asthma due to DDT in their mud hut; it had been sprayed for mosquitos and during the night the powder drifted down from the thatch roof into David's mosquito net. An hour's flight from any medical care other than himself, in the middle of the night, he felt helpless at the lack of a hospital in which to care for his son. He used what medication he had, and he prayed for God to bring his son through the crisis. Days later, David and several others were bitten by a rabid dog, presenting another huge challenge to a young physician full of enthusiasm, with excellent training and knowledge, but no access to modern medications or equipment. Miraculously, an airline pilot heard Dr. Dodds' plea on short-wave radio and was able to deliver rabies vaccine to the jungle camp.

In Peru, Dr. Dodds devoted his time to caring for persons of about sixty Indigenous people groups throughout the Amazon of Peru, an area about the size of the state of California. He frequently flew to far villages, landing on the rivers with a float plane. He encountered patients with illnesses and situations such as Jesus faced in New Testament times, and often wished he had the same power to do miracles. At the center of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), near Pucallpa, where the Dodds lived, Lawrence provided medical care to local Indigenous groups, those from far-flung villages in the Amazon, and the adults of SIL and their children assigned to the linguistic study center. There they analyzed the Indigenous language, developed alphabets and primers, taught literacy, and translated the New Testament and other important documents and books. He and his staff also trained community health workers selected by their villages.

Originally one of three medical doctors at the center, Dr. Dodds served as the only doctor for seven years but continued providing medical care for the same groups throughout the jungle. He often traveled by canoe or float plane holding clinics for two or three weeks at a time, sharing in the hardships of the people of tiny villages. Once, after a flood of the huge Ucayali river, which destroyed all the fields and gardens, the people had nothing but boiled green bananas to eat for weeks; Dr. Dodds shared this meager food. He continued serving, even sharing their diseases such as whooping cough, hepatitis, and tuberculosis. His strength of character and dedication kept him working even during those times.

Without any screening methods, and living almost next door to the clinic, Dr. Dodds was on call 24/7 for seven years, with few breaks. He finally became so exhausted that he felt he would die. At that time, he was transferred to Lima, to serve as the SIL-government liaison officer. He loved that job, changing from his khakis and sandals to a three-piece suit, meeting with generals, cabinet members, and other high officials to represent SIL's work with indigenous peoples.

Dr. Dodds returned to the U.S. for recovery, taking a position in the Public Health Department of Ventura County, back in the hospital where he had trained. Always loved and respected by the medical community there he was appointed to head the department. County personnel called his department "The Promised Land," or "The New Jerusalem" because so many persons wanted to join his staff of 240. Ten years there provided time for recovery, earning another graduate degree and specialty (preventive medicine), funds for college and graduate school for his children and his wife, and savings for retirement years.

One day while pondering why he had chosen a career in medicine and why he had ended up with such diverse phases of practice, it occurred to him that every venue had one thing in common: serving people who would not otherwise get care—the Vietnamese villagers, the addicts off the street, traumatized

persons, indigenous peoples of the Amazon, and missionaries who had chosen a life of service in an extremely harsh environment.

During ten years of overseas travel with Lois every summer, in which they taught in a master's degree program with Azusa Pacific University, the Dodds began to formulate the idea of creating a care center for international humanitarian workers. Everywhere they taught, in country after country, many expatriates from various countries were in burnout and crisis, needing a place of respite and various kinds of care. Together they began to dream of providing multi-disciplinary care for these dedicated and self-giving people, willing to work in impossible circumstances in difficult places. So, in 1992 Dr. Dodds resigned his six-figure salary and began, with Lois, the process of incorporating a non-profit organization. They began with no salary, but with great expectation that if this were God's call to another phase of ministry He would provide.

Through unexpected sources the couple were invited to Pennsylvania and offered a beautiful mountainside on which to create a retreat center. Their board approved, and they moved to the area in which sixty percent of furloughing overseas workers can reach them within a day's drive. Not wanting to focus on raising the million dollars needed to develop the mountainside, they began programs using their own newly built home.

Since 1994 the Dodds have had over seven hundred overseas workers stay with them for two weeks or more, usually in groups of ten. In addition, hundreds of others have come for short stays and over two hundred for training courses. They now use three homes to house their guests. With some regular staff and many volunteers, they offer regular "Intensive Care" programs (multi-disciplinary) and accredited training courses each year. Guests pay a minimal fee; agencies, churches, and individuals contribute funds to run the programs. Doctor Dodds has worked twelve years now as a full-time volunteer, receiving no compensation for his medical services.

Three years after being diagnosed with ALS, Dr. Dodds also began treatment for cancer. Each treatment for that caused some step-down in his physical strength. Though the typical patient with ALS lives only two or three years, and only about ten percent live beyond five years, Dr. Dodds continues to have a very full life, continually engaged with others in need. He says he decided immediately that ALS is not his identity—it is just something he has to deal with. With his robust singing and hearty laughter, the ability to speak, and his mind still bright, he contributes inspiration, enthusiasm, love, compassion, and up-to-date knowledge within the organization and programs. Those who attend are amazed at his wisdom, gentleness, acceptance, and sense of humor.

Dr. Dodds is still active as a father, visiting and talking with his children and eight grandchildren regularly. They call him for advice (such as "Grandpa, could you help me with my school science project?") and for fun. Dr. Dodds believes that this full-life engagement and the sustaining love and grace of God have enabled him to continue living such a full life.