

MedAdvance highlights importance of health care missions

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RALEIGH, N.C.—Health care missions provide access to millions of people who've never heard of the Great Physician, and health care professionals play a crucial role in prescribing treatment for both physical and spiritual needs.

These were some of the messages attendees of MedAdvance heard. The conference was designed to inform, mobilize and connect health care professionals and students with International Mission Board missionaries serving in medical missions roles.

Held yearly since 2007, MedAdvance 2025 met in Raleigh, N.C., from Aug. 21-23 at Providence Church.

More than 300 people, including 47 health care students, attended. Participants included an endodontist, nurses, physician assistants, an OBGYN, general practitioners, nurses who are members of a chapter of the Filipino Woman's Missionary Union and a church volunteer coordinator.

Some MedAdvance participants, like a physician assistant and her family who are preparing to move to West Africa and a nurse who is pursuing work among the Deaf, are currently in the process of serving with the IMB. Others, like the group of Filipino nurses, were exploring ways to serve. Others were looking to get involved through prayer and giving.



Dr. Tom Hicks speaks with a health care professional at MedAdvance 2025, which met in Raleigh, N.C. Hicks said many people come to MedAdvance because the Lord is calling them in some way, whether it is short-term, mid-term, long-term. "We're always looking for ways that we can help fill those requests," he said. (IMB Photo)

Tom Hicks, IMB director of global health strategies, said he's seeing a movement of greater understanding among Southern Baptists of how the IMB is involved in health care missions.

Hicks' prayer was that attendees would see how they can participate in healthcare missions, whether that's praying more effectively, giving specifically and strategically or going. The many commitment cards placed on two maps of the world at the end of MedAdvance were evidence this prayer was answered.

IMB President Paul Chitwood told participants via video that 12 percent of the IMB's missionary workforce have a medical background. IMB missionaries are touching the lives of 50,000 people through healthcare

ministries every year.

MedAdvance attendees participated in an affinity marathon, where they heard about the health care ministries of missionaries from the IMB's eight regions of service, including global Deaf ministry.

Health care ministries included art therapy for trauma survivors in Europe, training national medical workers in Sub-Saharan Africa, disease prevention in the Americas and pre- and post-natal care in the Asia-Pacific Rim.

The affinity marathon allowed conference attendees to learn about short- and long-term opportunities to serve.

Health care professionals attended breakout sessions on topics such as how to be a health care volunteer, engaging Hinduism and Islam, fitness and wellness strategies and how to address human needs in your community.

Veteran missionary doctor discusses strategies

In two packed sessions, Dr. Rebekah Naylor spoke on the core missionary task as it relates to health care missions. Naylor served 50 years with the IMB at Bangalore Baptist Hospital in India as a surgeon, chief of medical staff, administrator and medical superintendent.

Naylor walked MedAdvance participants through the ABCs (and DEs) of health care strategies: access, behind closed doors, caring for needs, disciple-making and empowering the church. Each of these connects with components of the core missionary task: entry, evangelism, disciple-making, leadership development, church formation and exit to partnership.



Rowena Mante prays during a guided prayer time during MedAdvance 2025. Mante is a nurse originally from the Philippines. She partnered with IMB missionaries in the Philippines while she lived there. She lives in Winston-Salem, N.C., and is a member of the Triad Journey Church, which is a predominantly Filipino church. She is a member of the Filipino Woman's Missionary Union and the Baptist Nursing Fellowship. (IMB Photo)

MedAdvance participants also learned about the Dr. Naylor Preach and Heal fund, which provides money for the health care ministries of IMB missionaries. Donations provide resources and services like ultrasound machines in the Asia-Pacific Rim, repairs for a gym in Thailand where IMB missionaries started a church and trauma-informed coloring books for refugee children.

Victor Hou, IMB associate vice president of global advance, reported from

2000 to 2100, the global population is projected to exceed the number of people who lived in the previous 600 years. An estimated 24.9 billion people will live, breathe and die in 100 years.

“Much of the credit goes to those of you who are health care professionals,” Hou said. “Because of your skills, because of the advances of medical technologies, because of the training and what you’re able to bring, we’ve seen lives extended. We’ve seen longevity in lifespan, and we are better at treating diseases and keeping people healthier.”

However, there is no earthly cure for the diagnosis every human receives at birth.

“Why has God placed us in this generation, in this era, in this time when we see the greatest number of people on earth and unprecedented human growth?” Hou asked.

“God has given all of us and the church this opportunity to steward his gospel to the greatest number of people who have ever walked the face of the earth.”

‘We are going to make disciples’

April Bunn, the IMB’s prayer office director, led participants through three prayer sessions. She reported 166,338 people die daily having never heard the name of Jesus.

Dr. Joel Vaughan spoke during two sessions. Vaughan is an internal medicine and pediatrics physician and served for 10 years with the IMB. He now practices medicine for a Duke Health primary care clinic in Raleigh.



Dr. Joel Vaughan speaks to gathered medical professionals, students and IMB personnel as part of MedAdvance 2025. Twenty-two years ago, sitting in this same sanctuary, the trajectory of Vaughan's life changed. Vaughan, an internal medicine and pediatrics physician, served with the IMB for 10 years. He now practices medicine for a Duke Health primary care clinic in Raleigh, N.C. (IMB Photo)

"When we go, we're not going principally to treat diabetes or rehab a bad contracture or remove a gallbladder. We're going to make disciples," Vaughan said.

Vaughan's journey to the mission field began at Providence, just a few feet from where he stood.

As a 22-year-old, he sat in the sanctuary and petitioned the Lord to show him what he should do after graduating. After pleading for weeks, God answered through someone who read John 14:6, "I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me."

Vaughan suggested that some in the room were in a similar situation this weekend.

"Jesus shows the way as we walk with him, as we follow him, as we're willing to do whatever he asks us to do," Vaughan said. "He's going to use who you are, what you have and your skills."

Todd Lafferty, the IMB's executive vice president, was the key speaker during the evening sessions.

"Some of you might be sensing [God] wants you to go full time," Lafferty said. "Now is the time to use your health care skills and combine that with the need on the field to reach people that wouldn't otherwise be reached."

"You have a unique opportunity in the mission in our day to get to the places where most people can't because of the skills that you have."

Dr. Nora Chiu, an OBGYN from Houston, attended MedAdvance last year and felt the Lord leading her to use her medical skills on the mission field. She began the application process with the IMB and came to this year's MedAdvance to confirm her calling.

"I would have never imagined using medicine to do missions," Chiu said. "There are so many needs I didn't realize."

Attending this year's MedAdvance helped confirm her call.

During the closing session, attendees were encouraged to make a commitment to partner by marking a commitment card. According to early reports, 70 committed to pray, 49 were interested in short-term trips, 12 indicated interest in mobilizing for health care missions and 35 committed to pursuing mid- or long-term service.