



# Delivering Health Care in the Field

BY DOUG SCOTT

Migrant worker Fernando Entslin picks tomatoes at Murray Farms, which participates in the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project.

PA Program Brings Health Care to

**THERE WAS A LOOK OF CONCERN** on the Emory University PA student's face.

Sure enough, after she took an EKG of the migrant farmworker who had complained of chest pains, the results confirmed her worst fears: an evolving myocardial infarction. The PA student asked the 30-year-old man to wait and briefly left him to help arrange for emergency transportation to the local ER. By the time she returned with PA Tom Himelick, the patient had disappeared.

"[The farmworker] was from Mexico, and his history was that his father died when he was very young," recalled Himelick, project coordinator. "The people in his home community said a witch had put a curse on his father and he had dropped dead. To us, it sounded like he probably had a strong hereditary history of early cardiac disease." >>>



PA student Sara Yeskel (at left) and translator Haydee Santiago speak with a migrant worker who did not wish to be identified during an evening session of the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project

Photos by Lami Chappell

# Migrant & Seasonal Farmworkers

**Migrant workers line up for the morning session of the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project.**

**THE PA STUDENT**, who spoke fluent Spanish, went around the camp, asking other migrant workers about the cardiac patient. She quickly discovered that the young man was scared to go to the local hospital.

"[The PA student] became a patient advocate," Himelick said. "She convinced [the farmworker's] friends to tell her where he was. She went and found him, talked to him and essentially said, 'I will go with you, hold your hand there and be with you,' and she did. At the hospital, it turned out that the patient had positive cardiac enzymes, so she may well have saved his life."

Since 1996, Emory PA students have gone to the farmland of southeast Georgia, where they set up mobile



**Migrant worker Simon Barrera is checked by Emory PA student Marisa Rosado (at right) during a morning session of the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project.**

health clinics for the migrant farmworkers. Working in teams of PA students and faculty, the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project typically provides health care to 1,500 to 1,700 migrant and seasonal farmworkers during a two-week project in July, and to 270 to 300 migrant and seasonal farmworkers during the October weekend project.

This year, the farmworkers project was chosen to be the focus of the Host City Prevention Campaign 2010. The project will receive a \$10,000 check at AAPA's 38th



Annual Conference in Atlanta in May. HCPC is supported by AAPA, the PA Foundation, the Physician Assistant Education Association, and the Student Academy of AAPA.

The project provides free outpatient care to farmworkers and their families, using a mobile outreach model to set up triage camps right in fields and migrant camps. Students and faculty are joined on the project by local volunteers, interpreters, nurses, Emory physical therapy and medical students, pediatricians and family practice physicians.

"This project has a tremendous impact on both migrant farmworkers and the PA students and faculty," said Himelick, who is also the director of community projects at Emory. "Plus, the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project is a good opportunity for people to know what a PA is and not just to patients we serve but community people and other health care professionals who join us on this project. From a professional standpoint, that is probably one of the good things to come out of it."

Considering the farmworkers project receives no federal or state funding, or any Emory tuition monies,

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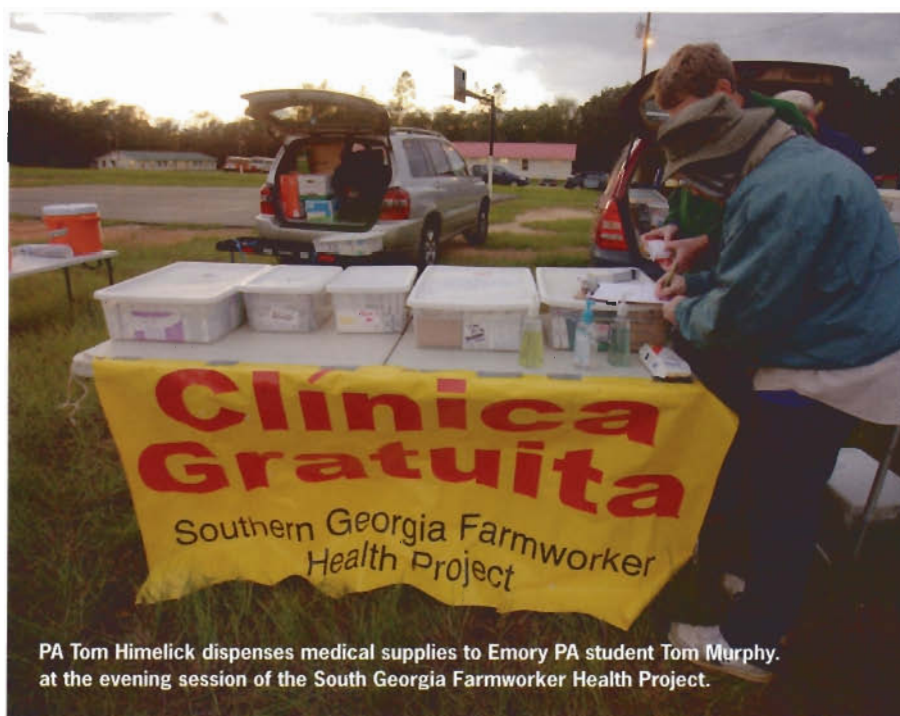


Himelick said, “From the standpoint of the person who has pasted together the budget every year since starting it, having the \$10,000 [HCPC] contribution towards our expenses is wonderful; we are really appreciative and excited to have this happen.”

Jodi Sindelar, an Emory PA student, has worked with the farmworkers project on two occasions. She believes that involvement in the project will have great impact on her future career as a PA.

“This was really my first experience being able to work directly with my own fellow colleagues in a PA-to-PA atmosphere, alongside my preceptors and other health care providers,” said Sindelar, who graduates this month and hopes to go into pediatric gastroenterology.

“In the beginning, it is really overwhelming when you have a huge, long, continuously growing line of patients and it’s 11:30 at night. But knowing that you can rely on your fellow classmates and colleagues to get everything done and that we are going to be able to help the migrant farmworkers and their families was something that we all felt by the end of the night was a huge accomplishment. It was a great experience being able to actually help



PA Tom Himelick dispenses medical supplies to Emory PA student Tom Murphy. at the evening session of the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project.



**Emory PA student Jodi Sindelar examines a patient during the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project.**

people who were genuinely appreciative of the care that they were receiving.”

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the number of migrant farm and seasonal workers in south Georgia annually exceeds around 100,000 per year. And the Kaiser Family Foundation notes that this region is one of the top eight states for migrant/seasonal farmworkers in the US.

According to the 2006 Georgia Farm Gate Value Report, the cultivation and harvest of fruits and vegetables in Georgia have a net value of approximately \$1.13 billion per year. Yet, pickers in Georgia live in poverty, with the national annual income range reported in the National Agricultural Workers Survey between \$10,000 and \$12,499. Despite this finding, the Internal Revenue Service reports that 38 percent of farmworkers in the US reported an annual income under \$10,000 in 2007.

Migrant workers live in “rough” camps, which are usually 15 to 20 miles from the nearest town with limited access to transportation to get to an emergency room or

health clinic. With limited finances and language barriers, many fear the arduous trek owing to the sometimes hostile reception they receive from the local population.

“I think they feel some hostility and recognize that it is a country other than their own, but most of us don’t know how hard they work,” said Himelick, who with the help of the Southwest Georgia Area Health Education Center, began the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project back in 1996 as a small, five-day pilot project with eight PA students, three faculty, and one physician. “We have all heard them say over and over to us, “Thank you for being so kind.”

“So I believe this project has an impact on an individual level; someone—in this case a PA student—taking the time to talk to someone even if their complaints could be managed with medicines from Wal-Mart or at least helping them to understand that. Or maybe helping them know how to avoid getting their feet reinfected with athlete’s foot.”

The farmworkers project is organized as a walk-in



Emory PA student Nicole Jaeger examines a patient after taking her medical history during the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project.

she had had no prenatal care because of lack of access. She was extremely scared but so thankful that we were there to assess and get her the help that she needed.”

If needed, follow-up care is provided at the Migrant Farmworkers Clinic in Lake Park, Ga., or the Decatur County Farmworker Program clinic in Bainbridge, Ga.

Himelick said the students’ learning did not end with their health care experience.



Tom Himelick, Randy Bundschu and Terry Mize handle medications and samples during the morning session of the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project

“There is a kind of gradual realization from students saying, ‘Oh, what a wonderful thing that we are doing and we are providing care to these underserved people,’ to them starting to reflect on the contributions that these patients are making to their lives; to their own comfort and to our food supply,” said Himelick. “I had a student who wrote in her essay that going down [to south Georgia] is just trying to pay back a little bit of that debt. She said she owed this to the people who she was taking care of because they take care of us every day. This was the kind of an ‘ah-ha’ moment, and she is right!” PA

For more information on the South Georgia Farmworker Health Project, visit [http://www.emorypa.org/community\\_involvement.htm](http://www.emorypa.org/community_involvement.htm).

clinic. When migrants arrive, they have their vitals checked by either local volunteers or nursing students. Under the supervision of a facility member, graduate PA or physician, the PA student teamed with an interpreter will then see the farmworkers or their families.

“A lot of times we just provide a general primary care checkup because many of the migrant farmworkers have never been seen by a medical provider before,” Sindelar said. “I recall seeing a 65-year-old gentleman, and I was the first health care provider that he had ever seen and he had been coming across to the U.S. for 40-plus years. He wanted a general checkup to learn about what he should eat and the kinds of things he could do to keep himself healthy. It was truly an honor to sit with this amazing man, share with him preventive health care measures and simply listen to the stories from his past. I learned more from this 40-minute visit than any medical book could ever teach.

“Other times, we do find acute illnesses. Upon arrival at a campsite, a woman was actually in the midst of having a placenta previa. She was going into labor and having a lot of abdominal pain. This was her first child, and

## South Georgia Farmworker Health Project Receives Needed Support

This year, the Emory University PA Program’s South Georgia Farmworker Health Project (SGFHP) was chosen to be the focus of the Host City Prevention Campaign 2010. The project will receive a \$10,000 check at Impact 2010 AAPA’s 38th Annual Conference in Atlanta May 29 – June 3. HCPC is supported by AAPA, the PA Foundation, the Physician Assistant Education Association and the Student Academy of AAPA. For more information, see (Need SGFHP audioslideshow URL). PA

# IMPACT

EVOLVE TO TRANSFORM 2010

AAPA's 38th ANNUAL PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT CONFERENCE ATLANTA GEORGIA MAY 29 - JUNE 3