



Mike Russell:

Master Puzzle Solver

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Fresh from the box, a new jigsaw puzzle is piled on the table, looking the jumbled mess of pieces that puzzle solvers love. Like pieces are gathered in little piles. These look like the tree. Those look like the sun. Maybe this is the boat?

Mike Russell's pieces reflect his work in student government, business and health care for developing nations. Russell is a fourth-year medical student in the MD/MBA program, a joint degree between the TTUHSC School of Medicine and TTU Rawls College of Business. He also is a graduate student in the TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences master's program in public health. And, Russell was the 2015-2016 TTUHSC Student Government Association president.

A native of Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, Russell earned a degree in chemical engineering from Kettering University in Flint, Michigan, and worked three years for General Motors in alternative energies research. Slowly he began to realize there were pieces missing from his puzzle.

As an engineer, Russell liked to fix things ... to put broken pieces back together. That realization, coupled with extensive experience watching his physician-parents provide health care overseas, brought him to the study of medicine and to his passion, global medicine.

"I watched my parents work with patients in Africa, Haiti and the Middle East," he said. "Our family vacations were never Disneyland. They were Africa or somewhere else in the world that needed my parents' care."



By Jo Grant Langston | Photos provided by Mike Russell



A Tipping Point A trip to Haiti in 2010 to treat earthquake victims revealed a missing piece in Russell's puzzle. "I fell in love with what medicine is supposed to look like," he said. "These people were dying from preventable diseases."

And in the long lines of patients and the overwhelming poverty of that trip, Russell had an encounter that solidified his purpose.

"A 12-year-old boy asked us for water, but he was blind and couldn't see the bottle in my hand," he said. "He was blinded by a parasite, one that could have been treated. He was blinded because he had no access to basic medical care."

Working in Kenya yielded another puzzle piece, a desire to train as a surgeon. He saw the astronomical number of trauma cases from motor vehicle accidents in a country with minimal safety regulations and poor road conditions. Coupled with his experience teaching fourth graders in the Middle East, Russell felt drawn to orthopedic surgery.



Business and Public Health Pieces to the Puzzle Russell plans to establish health clinics, hospitals and residency programs in the developing world, hence his pursuit of graduate degrees in public health and business, in addition to medicine.

“I am learning how providing health care is very much a business,” he said. “The organization must remain viable in order to provide the care. Faculty and staff must understand the financial information so they can see the best way to deliver the care.”

The final piece of his puzzle has been serving as SGA president. “I love the Health Sciences Center,” he said. “Our school is exceptional. I meet new people everyday and can engage students in world issues involving medicine.”

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Fueling His Passion Russell quickly lists three things that have fueled his passion: luck, mentors and work ethic.

He calls his global experiences “luck,” or the product of good parenting, and they provided him a way to experience cultures, political institutions and the beauty of the people around the world from a very early age.

As mentors, he counts his parents Gary and Susan Russell, MD, church friends, and School of Medicine faculty members, Surendra K. Varma, MD, professor of pediatrics; John Fitzwater, MD assistant professor of surgery; and Dixon Santana, MD, associate professor of surgery.

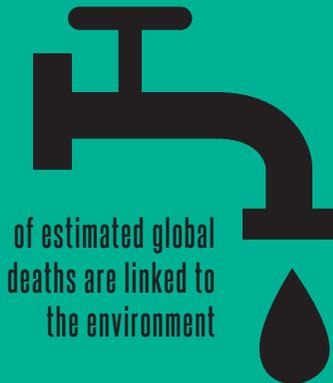
And lastly is his work ethic, experiencing as much as he possibly can to fulfill his global medicine passion.

The next pieces of Russell’s puzzle include the completion of his public health degree, travelling to India and Vietnam to observe orthopedic and rural surgery and the start of his third year of medical school, all this summer.

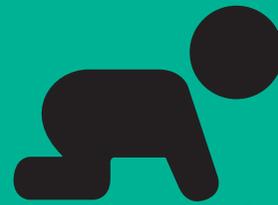
The pieces are fitting together nicely. Russell has knit together his experiences to make a stand for the health care needs of his global neighbors. Each experience yields a new piece, a new puzzle, a new solution. 

Global Health STATISTICS

23%



of estimated global deaths are linked to the environment



5.9 million children under 5 died in 2015; nearly

16,000 every day

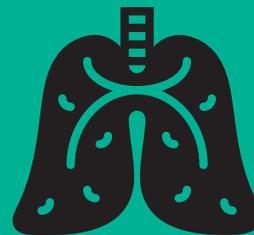


74%

of child deaths are in Africa and Southeast Asia



Africa leads the world in largest percentage of deaths from these conditions: **communicable, maternal, neonatal and nutritional conditions • non-communicable diseases • injuries**



9.6 million new tuberculosis cases in diagnosed in 2014



The leading causes of death worldwide: **Heart disease • Stroke • COPD • Respiratory infections • Trachea, bronchus, lung cancer • HIV/AIDS • Diabetes • Road injuries • Hypertensive heart disease**