

JULIE ABOUT CTO MISSIONS

Conversation with Julie Choueiki | Director of Nursing and Education

[About a CTO mission]

[Julie Choueiki, Program Manager, CTO Director of Education]

So, my name is Julie Choueiki, and I serve as the program manager for the Division of Colorectal and Pelvic Reconstruction at Children's National Hospital in Washington DC. It's my job as the Director of Education to make sure that the team that we send to foreign countries is equipped and ready to teach. We have to teach all the teams to be the experts in their country and we have to do that on a short mission trip. So, it's my job to make sure that we're preparing our educational mission and preparing our teachers, our nurses, our surgeons, whoever's going, how to deliver the content that we want in a manner in which the home country team can understand, and then use after we're gone.

Colorectal Team Overseas, or we call CTO, is a nonprofit organization. It is very separate from Children's National Hospital in Washington DC. While Dr. Levitt founded the nonprofit organization and got that started to help supplement his trips abroad, and getting team members from other countries to be able to travel abroad and do education and training for different surgeons and different countries, it was a very different mission than his work at Children's National Hospital, which is a hospital in Washington DC that cares for children from all over the United States, but also for children all over the world that can come to that hospital and get care. So, there he is the chief, the division chief, of the Colorectal and Pelvic Reconstruction program. So, he has two separate roles, as do I. I work as a program manager in the Division of Colorectal and Pelvic Reconstruction at Children's National, but I also serve as a board member for Colorectal Team Overseas. And together, these two organizations are able to help support children's care all over the world

Our goal is to help children all over the world who suffer from colorectal conditions. The only way we can achieve that is by educating others. When we go on trips, when we bring visitors to our hospital, very simply, we want to impart the knowledge that we have so that they can go back to their homes, whether it's somewhere else in the United States or somewhere outside of the United States, and take care of children with the knowledge that they learned and was imparted to them by our team when they were with us. So that is something that we work hard at every day, 365 days a year. We bring visitors to our team, we let them stand by us while we do our work, we teach them what we know, we share our knowledge, we don't keep it close to

our heart. We share it with the world so that they can go back home and then they can take care of children, and we are able to then help children that we will never see.

Marc Levitt is the world's expert in the care of children with colorectal conditions. There's no other surgeon practicing today that has performed more surgeries on these children than he has. I have watched him train and mentor and guide surgeons from all over the United States and all over the world so that they can in turn provide better care for these children. I believe his goal is that he doesn't want to be the place only place for these children to go. He wants children to be able to get good care locally and closer to home, and he knows that it's impossible, even with Colorectal Team Overseas, to go to every place in the world and train every doctor in the world. So, one of the missions is to go places, train a team, but also to bring a team back to the hospital where he's practicing at, so they can learn from us and then go forth and help more children. So, while we travel to some destinations to provide hands-on care in those countries, we also welcome surgeons and nurses from all over the world, even places we've never traveled, so that they can learn and go back to their countries and provide better care for our children.

And that's just something that speaks so dearly to me because these children are kids who don't have anywhere else to go. There are a million different heart surgeons to go to, but there's not a million different colorectal surgeons to go to. And quite honestly, there's not that many surgeons interested in providing care for these children, so it's a real struggle to find good care everywhere. And even if there are very engaged surgeons in those countries, they might not have the volume of patients that we're able to see in Washington DC, so they can't become the experts that they want to become because there's not enough children to do the cases. You have to do something over and over and over again to be an expert. And if you don't see 9, 10, 15 children a year with a cloacal malformation, you can't possibly become an expert on cloacal malformations if you're seeing one every year, or one every two years. So, it's important that there is a destination center for these children to come and get treatment, but it's equally important that we go and train as many people as possible in the world.