

MOMENTS

IN MEDICINE AT MICHIGAN

“Not everybody has to be a hero.
You just have to make a contribution
where you can.”—Suresh Rangarajan

“**W**e meet once a week in Adrian — about ten physicians, nurses and translators — and go out to a camp. We set up folding tables. Supplies are donated by local hospitals. It’s basically stethoscope-and-blood-pressure-cuff diagnosis, but you’re out there, being what a doctor used to be, delivering care in the patient’s ‘home.’ The care’s not purely medical; it’s partly social. It’s where medicine, public health and human rights intersect.

“When we get there, they’re coming back from a day of work that started at six in the morning, and they have smiles on their faces. They do intense manual labor, crouching over all day long in hot fields, six days a week, year-round. And the U.S. farming community would shut down without them.

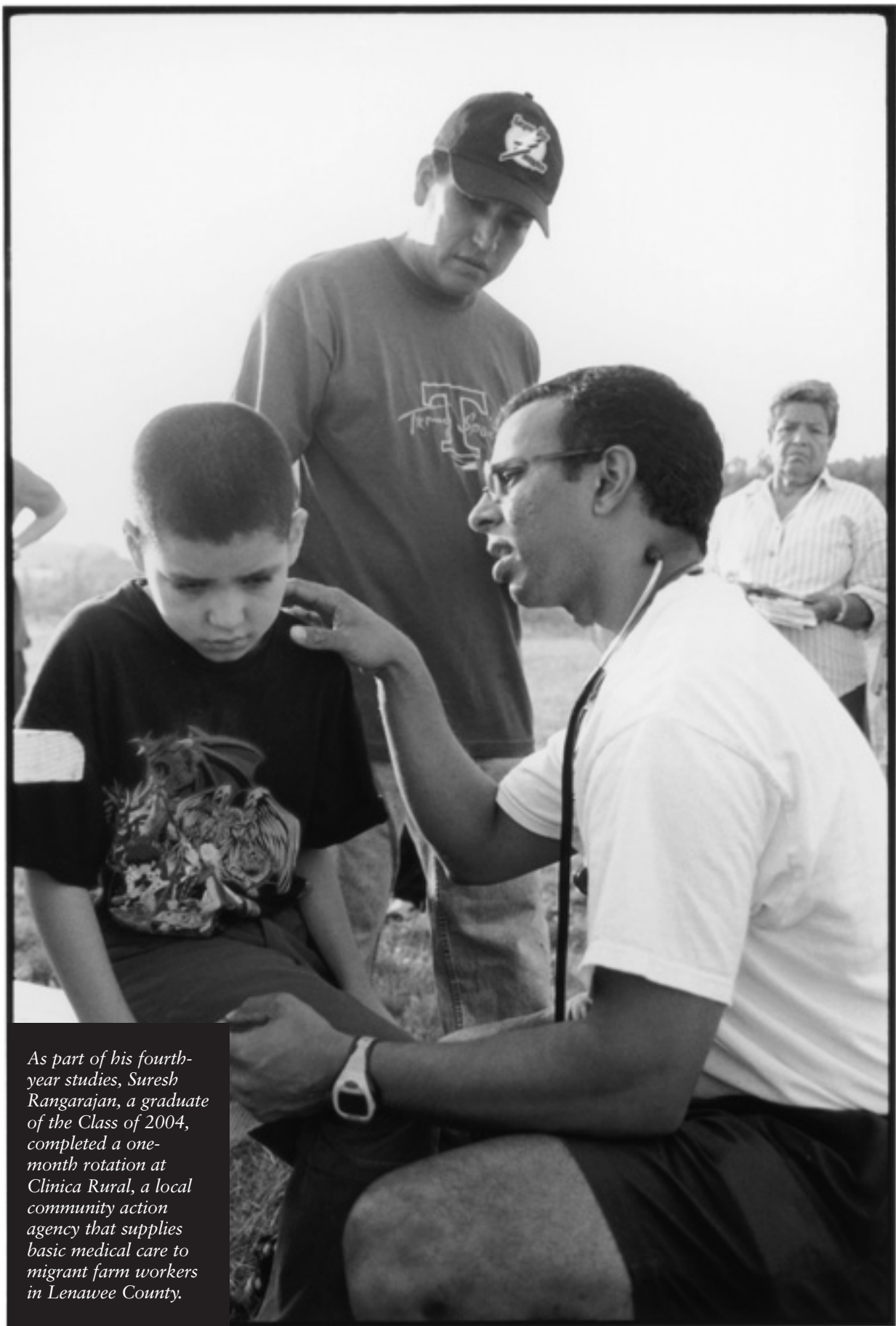
“It used to be, several decades ago, that migrant workers’ primary illness was infectious disease, and the average life expectancy was in the late 20s. Some now live into their 50s or longer, so we’re dealing with a more challenging set of chronic issues: hypertension, diabetes, glaucoma, high cholesterol. The kids have a lot of asthma and allergies; they sleep on floors that are dirty. There’s a great deal of pollen in the air, and pesticides. Many of these conditions typically would be treated in a clinic, but these people don’t get any medical management or continuing care. As soon as you begin to treat them, they move on to the next camp. It’s a huge challenge.

“Nothing is very practical in serving these populations. The thing is to find a population that needs serving and to do what a lot of us went into medicine for: to follow our hearts and do good work. You don’t have to go all over the world to do that — these people are 45 minutes from Ann Arbor.

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*Interview by Whitley Hill
Photograph by J. Adrian Wylie*

Rangarajan is currently volunteering at Hospital del Niño, a public children’s hospital in La Paz, Bolivia, before beginning a medicine-pediatrics residency back in the States in June. For a more extensive account of his experience serving the Michigan migrant farm-worker community, visit www.umich.edu/pediatrics/news/MigrantChildren.pdf.



As part of his fourth-year studies, Suresh Rangarajan, a graduate of the Class of 2004, completed a one-month rotation at Clinica Rural, a local community action agency that supplies basic medical care to migrant farm workers in Lenawee County.