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Ivana Čopová divides her free time between her boyfriend and little patients at the Motol University Hospital. She says she learns a lot from them, she likes playing with them and admits teenagers are more difficult to get along with. "The children sometimes seem to know more about their illness than we, would-be doctors do," says the student of the Charles University 2nd Faculty of Medicine who has been working for the Volunteer Centre

at the Motol University Hospital for more than two years now and is planning a stay in Africa for next year.



You started cooperating with the Volunteer Centre three years ago when you were a 2nd-year medical student. What brought you to that decision?

In the first two years of studies you only sit over books. There is little clinical practice in the curriculum and you rarely get to see any patients. It is important for doctors to manage not only the technical aspect of the therapy but also to be able to communicate with the patients. I wanted to see what it would be like with children. In my second year of studies I started attending the children's diabetes department in Motol. There the children stay for only two or three days so every time there were totally new patients. Now I'm helping out at the children's gastroenterology department and there it is a little different.

Do the patients stay longer at the gastroenterology department?

The Motol Paediatric Clinic provides highly specialized and expert care to children from the whole of the Czech Republic. The same applies to the children's gastroenterology and care for children with autoimmune diseases. Motol brings together cases that you don't see elsewhere – children with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis and autoimmune hepatitis. Those are long-term illnesses and patients often need short-term hospitalization. There are around twenty children at the department and it is an advantage that I get to see some of the children more frequently. But still you need to establish new contact and you only have two hours for that.

But as a medical student you can assess what is wrong with the little patients...

No one knows I am a medical student and because there are only doctors everywhere, I believe it makes both the children and their parents happy to see someone who is not wearing a white coat. You are right that one is affected by one's studies so I sometimes find myself trying to subconsciously determine the diagnosis. By communicating regularly with the children at the department, I learn a lot from them. The children are aware of their illness and sometimes seem

to know more about it than we, would-be doctors do. Their life is very much affected by their disease yet they are full of energy, they run around and sometimes misbehave. At other times during the activities they start confiding about the various tests they had undergone. Mainly boys are proud of what they had managed.

Older patients are hospitalized at the children's part as well. How do you manage to keep the different age groups busy?

The most difficult part is to establish new contact with new patients, but sometimes it happens that I make friends with someone in just two hours. Only with adolescent patients it is a little more difficult but cards usually break the ice. According to a Czech proverb, I guess I will be lucky in love because I lose in the card games most of the time... Younger children are easier to be with, we usually play board games and we create whatever takes our fancy. Luckily, we receive material support from the centre so we have colouring books, plasticine, crayons, beads etc. Our products are displayed at the department; the Volunteer Centre organizes exhibitions and uses some of the products as gifts for patients from the long-term care department.

Do you ever feel so exhausted that you don't feel like visiting the children?

When one doesn't feel well, it is better to give it a miss, but I must admit that as a medical student I look at illnesses a little differently. Besides, the centre organizes regular meetings once every two months where we evaluate our work in the presence of a psychologist who can offer advice if needed. Volunteers in Motol are divided according to whether they work with children, oncology patients or visit the long-term care department.

The Volunteer Centre is a part of the Motol University Hospital. Its objective is to offer support to volunteers who try to actively help to improve the psychological well-being of patients and participate in their effective cure.

Dobrovolnické centrum je součástí Fakultní nemocnice v Motole. Jeho úkolem je poskytnout oporu dobrovolníkům. Ti se snaží především aktivně zlepšit duševní pohodu pacientů a podílet se tak na jejich efektivním uzdravení.



Ivana Čopová, studentka 5. ročníku 2. LF UK:

"Chtěla bych si udělat první atestaci z pediatrie a pak se specializovat, uvidíme."