

## Why I Work With AHMEN: Dr. Ben Coplan's Story

Hi, my name is Bennett Coplan, MD. I am a retired pediatrician from Northern California, USA. I worked for Kaiser Permanente for 40 years. I loved my work, and enjoyed getting up each day to see kids, well care and ill. At Kaiser we emphasized keeping kids well, and our group did the evaluations for several vaccines before general release, including chickenpox and nasal flu vaccines. I did clinic, night clinic, ward, and nursery. The group had most needed specialists, and we helped each other. I also taught CPR and neonatal resuscitation. I retired 6 years ago, following a serious bicycle accident with brain injury which left me with a less than perfect memory.

Eight years ago, I came to Honduras with AHMEN to be with my daughter, a nurse. The families were happy to be seen, as many of them had never seen a doctor before. I felt like a good guy again. Honduras was hot, humid, beautiful, and so needy. I have returned fifteen times. The medicine reminds me of being on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, where I worked for a year in the early 70's.

We stay in better places now, sometimes with air conditioning, adequate food, (mostly beans and rice), and with wonderful people. I am an Orthodox Jew, and my mother would turn over in her grave if she saw me with these Christians. Before these trips, I thought Christians from the south didn't like Jews, but I have changed. If doing God's work means helping these Hondurans, then I have to love them, and they love me.

We used to have clinics in rural villages, seeing hundreds each day. I alone would see 50 or so each day. Wow. I did the best I could. I remind myself that we were created in the Lord's image, which does not mean we are perfect. But we must do whatever we can.





The last three years I have taught in conferences with “community agents”, local people who do basic medical care in their villages, where there is no formal medical care. I have found these agents to be bright, caring, and very attentive. They can remember an amazing amount of material if it allows them to help others. Because they live there, and know the living situation of each villager, their care is personal and very effective. We especially focus on cleanliness, clean and purified water, use of filters to screen bacteria from the water. Dirty water is the number one killer in the third world.

It is so flattering to be welcomed back and remembered as Dr. Ben. I have had to accept their compliments, as I usually am uncomfortable with praise. I love seeing kids grow up and see me over the years. I have many Honduran friends, including Dr.

Luther Castillo Harry who went to med school in Cuba, and was the Minister of Health in the Zelaya government, before the coup.

I bring a doll for my talk, to show baby care. The children have no dolls. I give my doll away to a local child when I leave. My latest project is to raise money to bring many dolls to our clinics, and have recruited a local teenager to distribute them. If you wish to contribute, call me at 925-862-2061. I need ideas as well as money.