James and Ortiz head out with the MobileDerm team to a clinic on the North Side.

DERMATOLOGY ON WHEELS

The sun has begun to rise as Alaina James, assistant professor of dermatology, packs a black Suburban with medical equipment. James and the rest of the MobileDerm team—one resident, one medical student and sometimes an undergraduate—are preparing for a full day of seeing patients at rural community clinics. These areas are often more than an hour's drive from Pittsburgh, places where patients don't have regular access to a dermatologist. James sits behind the wheel on this cool, spring morning. Next to her, a student navigator mixes the directions to Coalport, Pa., in Clearfield County, with conversation about career goals, favorite restaurants and new movies to watch.

James created MobileDerm to offer dermatologic care to uninsured patients in the greater Pittsburgh area. After enlisting help from a couple of medical students, she expanded MobileDerm's reach into rural areas in central Pennsylvania—counties she calls "dermatology deserts"—and partnered with community leaders to gain traction.

Camila Ortiz, a fourth-year med student, has accompanied James on several visits to clinics in Clearfield and Butler counties, as well as one on Pittsburgh's North Side. Working with James has taught her how dermatologic conditions can "severely compromise people," Ortiz says. "Something as apparent as your skin plays a role in your self-confidence, and how you operate, and how you act around others."

James says she encounters patients of all ages at the rural clinic; they have rashes, lesions, bumps and even melanomas. In the field, they're able to perform biopsies, whole-body skin exams and small procedures such as cryotherapy.

At about 4:30 p.m. in Coalport, the MobileDerm team packs up their equipment and loads it back into the Suburban. Today they treated about 25 patients.

"They're so thankful to have their care attended to," Ortiz says. "And every time I leave the clinic, even if it's a long day, I'm on cloud nine."

—*Hope Reveche*
—*Photography by Aimee Obidzinski/University of Pittsburgh*