



Home Town Heroes, International Outreach

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“Please give me the coat-hanger.” I was shocked as Dr. Azharuddin, an attending Orthopaedic Surgeon in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, fashioned an external fixator from a wire resembling a coat-hanger and PMMA to stabilize a mid-shaft tibia fracture. He remarked that this device costs pennies on the dollar compared to the frames we use in the United States. These innovative solutions in a resources scarce environment are common in the developing world. There is much to learn from our colleagues in these regions. Over the past several years, Penn Orthopaedic Surgery Department has been at the forefront international collaborations.

This past November, Dr. Vincent Arlet traveled to Trinidad to celebrate the ten year anniversary of the outreach mission. Over the past ten years, Dr. Arlet has led a team that has cared for over eighty patients with severe spinal deformities. Furthermore, his team has had fifteen residents and fellows that have assisted Dr. Arlet in his efforts.

December 2, 2016 marked the 2nd annual Penn Global Surgery symposium, entitled, “Multidisciplinary Approaches to Sustainable Global Surgery.” Penn Orthopaedic’s own Dr. James Friedman and Dr. David Spiegel spearheaded the event. The venue was packed with students, nurses, resident and attending physicians. Dr. Mark Shrime, Assistant Professor of Otolaryngology and of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, provided a keynote presentation that detailed the feasibility of delivering low cost and sustainable surgical care to the five billion people across the world that currently lack access. Other featured speakers included Dr. Georges Azzie, Pediatric Surgeon at University of Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children, Dr. David Spiegel, Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), Dr. Kassa Darge, Chairman of Pediatric Radiology at CHOP, Dr. Joshua Atkins, Associate Professor of Anesthesia and Critical Care at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Mark Morgan, Chief of Gynecologic Oncology at the University of Pennsylvania. Combined, not only have their global surgery efforts reached Nepal, China, Eritrea, Botswana, Ethiopia, and Rwanda but also their actions have also inspired the next generation of leaders in global health.

Dr. David Spiegel traveled to Iraq, Nepal, and Pakistan over the course of the past year to collaborate with other orthopedists in caring for pediatric patients. Dr. Spiegel received a grant from CHOP to carry on this important work for a minimum of ten years of follow up in Nepal. Notably, Dr. Spiegel was awarded the Walter P. Blount Humanitarian Award from the Scoliosis Research Society and the Humanitarian Award from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

In collaboration with the University of Botswana, Penn’s Dr. Jaimo Ahn with the support of the Biedermann family, set the stage to establish another international collaboration called the Botswana UPenn Partnership (BUP). This region is ridden with orthopaedic trauma from motor vehicle collisions. Trauma has surpassed the morbidity and mortality of the burden of HIV in the region. Additionally, long term problems such as degenerative joint disease have wait lists as long as six months to receive needed surgery. Dr. Ahn hopes that this partnership will blossom over the years to become a robust educational, clinical, and research collaboration.

In Tanzania, Dr. Neil Sheth has continued to lead a team to develop a novel and sustainable venue for orthopaedic care in East Africa. The team has proposed to build an Orthopaedic Center of Excellence at Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center in Moshi, Tanzania. Surgical teams from Penn and twenty-five partner institutions will coordinate a rotating schedule of two week blocks to ensure year round surgical center staffing. The center will act as a collaborative training center for local health care providers including surgeons, residents, nurses, and therapists. Dr. Sheth traveled with his team including Physician Assistant Kevin Zakielarz and Clinical Research Assistant Mack Hardaker in February 2017 to meet with leaders in the region to set up fund raising efforts.

In conclusion, Penn Orthopaedics has lead in multiple outlets for international collaboration and outreach. These efforts enhance the Department’s academic mission for clinical, educational, and research excellence. Their work will benefit many generations to come.