

International scope of medical care

The second International Congress of the International Federation of Pediatric Orthopaedic Societies was held in Sendai, Japan from the first to the third of November 2001: seven weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11. In his general address to the Congress attended by representatives from over thirty countries, Shoichi Kokubun MD, Congress President, called attention to the desperate plight of children in regions plagued by terrorism and political unrest. The challenge to all physicians, particularly those in the pediatric subspecialties, is to expand our efforts on behalf of the children in these strife torn regions.

The physical and psychological impact of the ongoing strife has been clear to most viewers of the televised actions in Afghanistan where literally thousands are crippled by the widely dispersed fields of landmines, strewn over the past decade of warfare. There has developed in the world today a wide gulf between the economically advantaged countries and the economically poor and underdeveloped countries. For example, the infant mortality rates vary from 7:1000 in the United States to 63:1000 in Indonesia and 73:1000 in Egypt.¹ Professor Kokubun stated that the under-served children of these areas will be unable to grow into responsible and productive citizens of the world community without proper health care.

The American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine has for over fifteen years worked to assist underdeveloped areas through its International Affairs Committee. Increasing numbers of international registrants from all over the world are attending the Academy's annual meetings. In 2001 the Academy made some scholarship money available to help pay the travel costs of deserving international attendees. The international affairs committee is planning a reception at the New Orleans meeting for international guests to help make their meeting experience a very positive one. The committee continues to generate ideas for new international initiatives. Copies of this journal are being distributed to under-served countries. Numerous individuals have volunteered their time in international exchange programs such as the upcoming European Mediterranean Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine Congress in Istanbul, Turkey. The European Pediatric Orthopaedic Society will also hold its 21st annual meeting in that city this spring.

In addition to international conferences, the direct volunteer activities of individual physicians are critical to

bringing acute care to the clinics and operating rooms. Health Volunteers Overseas orthopaedic programs are currently operative in Bhutan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Banepa, Nepal, Katmandu, Peru, the Philippines, St. Lucia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Vietnam. There are now on the internet over 71 websites listing volunteer organizations which offer services in Asia, Africa, South America, and the South Pacific.

Since the Bone and Joint Decade was launched in January 2000, numerous countries have approached the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons for assistance in providing international educational programming.² These include six countries in eastern Europe, three in South America, and six in Asia. Six such comprehensive review conferences have been conducted in the past two years in sites ranging from Bucharest, Romania to Jaipur, India. Great effort is also being made to provide translation of current orthopaedic journals and continuing medical education courses into European and Asian languages.

The tragic events of last September should give us all reason to reconsider the overwhelming need for humanitarian aid, which exists today in this new century. Physicians are uniquely qualified to help reverse the ever widening gulf between the advanced countries and those regions where basic health care resources are fragmented or under developed.

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References

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