

A MAGAZINE FOR TODAY'S FAMILY

March 2007

# Kidz <sup>TM</sup> Magazine

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**Doctors Deliver Hope Abroad**  
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# DOCTORS DELIVER HOPE

*by Providing Medical Care  
in Other Countries*



*by Kristine Coblitz*



**LOCAL** Local doctors are finding volunteer work as the right prescription for helping those less fortunate. As a result of their talent and generosity, people all over the world can get the medical attention that otherwise would be out of their reach.

Dr. Gina Agostino and Dr. Anthony Manes of Complete Chiropractic Health in Cranberry Township spent two weeks in Hyderabad, India after chiropractic school. They worked in rural areas, in a hospital, and in elementary and middle schools. Their team consisted of seven faculty members and 45 students who treated approximately 5,000 people. Each doctor saw about 100 patients.

Enduring long hours, rough working environments, and mental and physical exhaustion is part of the job, but according to Dr. Agostino, the hard work is worth it. "In the worst of conditions, many of these people have never seen a doctor before," she said, "and they are so appreciative. Even after a few days of meeting us, they brought us gifts of appreciation."

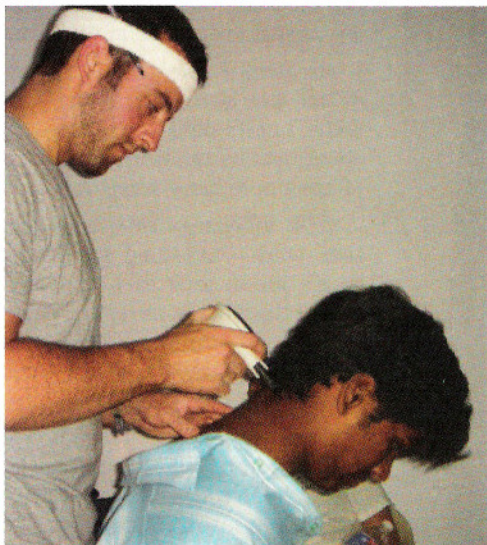
Dr. Agostino witnessed post-polio syndrome, improper nutrition, and deformities in knees and ankles, as well as developmental deformities in children. The doctors arrived during a religious holiday, so most of the patients had lower extremity pain and low back pain due to prolonged kneeling during prayers. "We arrived at the right time," she said.

Dr. Agostino's focus now is growing her chiropractic practice with Dr. Manes, who is also her fiancé, but the couple plans to go back to India. "It really humbles you and makes you realize the importance of everything you have and where you came from," she said. "I can't wait to go back."

Dr. Claver Soriano, an obstetrician and gynecologist for The Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh, not only provides health care to women in and around Pittsburgh, but also to women in the rural part of the Philippines. Through donations, he can offer medical and surgical equipment, instruments, and supplies, medical textbooks and journals, medications and money to hospitals, as well as clothing, toys, and food items to the poor residents in the area.

Dr. Soriano established his first mission team in 1999 with 22 volunteers, including physicians, nurses, and support members. The first humanitarian work was at a government-owned hospital in San Carlos City, Pangasinan, Philippines. Due to the success of that first effort, he has organized other missions, the most recent in Malasiqui, Pangasinan, Philippines, with more than 50 volunteers.

"Serving the poor through medical and surgical mission activities has been a wonderful event for all participants," he said. "They have the opportunity to come face to face with the reality that there are indeed people suffering in far away places that need our help." In all the areas Dr. Soriano and his team visited, more than 15,000 impoverished children and adults received free diagnostic tests and medications, and volunteer doctors performed surgeries on close to 2,000 patients. Mission



*Dr. Gina Agostino and Dr. Tony Manes, chiropractors, were part of a team of doctors that traveled to India to provide free services to those in need.*



*Dr. Claver Soriano, an obstetrician and gynecologist, has made numerous trips to the Philippines to help the needy.*



*Dr. Christina Teimouri, a podiatrist, traveled to Saudi Arabia to offer podiatry care.*



*Dr. Robert Prazer, an optometrist, has been volunteering his time in Guatemala for the past 10 years.*







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funds covered pre-op and post-op care expenses.

According to Dr. Soriano, "These individuals who are affected by a variety of debilitating diseases may never receive treatment due to extreme poverty. Our presence enables us to identify, diagnose, provide initial treatment, and perform corrective surgery on these poor souls, so they may go back in the community, become productive once again, and care for themselves and their families."

Dr. Christina Teimouri, a podiatrist at the Beaver Valley Foot Clinic, spent two weeks as a volunteer in Saudi Arabia, where she offered podiatry care. The opportunity allowed her to put her medical skills to good use and learn about a different culture, which included living on a compound and eating camel meat. "I got to see things there that normally people wouldn't get to see," she said. "The exposure to the culture was fascinating, and it was an amazing adventure."

Dr. Robert Prazer, an optometrist in Wexford, has traveled to Guatemala in Central America for the past 10 years. He goes twice a year, providing free eye exams, eyeglasses, and medicine to rural and poor areas. He signed up after a friend encouraged him to join Pennsylvania chapter of Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH/PA) International. With the help of fundraisers and sponsors, the organization built a clinic in Guatemala to provide year-round vision care to citizens.

Dr. Prazer has seen patients suffering from blindness, cataracts, infections, and other ailments, a large percentage of which require surgery. A memorable incident occurred when his team had to perform surgery in the jungle with no electricity. "It was a real challenge," he said.

Through his mission work, Dr. Prazer has formed an appreciation for his patients and the close-knit community they share in Guatemala. "I have a lot of respect for the way these people live," he said. "They are wonderful people, very patient and kind. They will walk for days and wait in line for hours to get medical care."

Dr. Doug Villella is a board member for VOSH/PA. The organization started in 1990 to build eye clinics in developing countries. He stressed the importance of empowering doctors in other countries, so the high level of care continues once the mission ends. Approximately 50,000 patients are treated every year in the clinics.

His work in Guatemala has changed him not only as a doctor, but also as a person. "I feel that my life is worthwhile, but if I didn't do this, I'd question that," he said. "It's about making the world a better place, and I can do that by offering optometry services."

Dr. Villella isn't the only doctor to be changed by mission work. According to Dr. Agostino, "The experience taught me to treat each patient equally. I saw things over there I'll probably never see again. This kind of experience teaches you compassion. It makes you thankful for our health care systems and thankful that chiropractic is so prevalent in this country."

Dr. Prazer agreed. "It can be hard seeing 4,000 patients in a week, but it's addicting because you can feel so good. You get back ten times what you give." As for providing medical care, he added, "Sometimes it's the most these people have." ★

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