

Improving healthcare around the world



Photo by John Reilly Photography

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In recent years, the AOA has seized the opportunity to play an increasingly important role in international healthcare. Putting patients first, we want to champion osteopathic principles and practice across the globe to improve worldwide health.

Country by country, the AOA Bureau on International Osteopathic Medical Education and Affairs (BIOMEA) advocates for practice rights for US-trained osteopathic physicians in foreign lands. DOs now have full practice rights in 44 countries. That's a great start, but we have 150 more countries to go.

To advance the interests of our profession, the AOA is actively involved in the International Association of Medical Regulatory Authorities (IAMRA). I serve on IAMRA's membership committee and will travel with 2008-09 AOA President Carlo J. DiMarco, DO, to the 8th International IAMRA Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, in early October.

In addition, through the Osteopathic International Alliance (OIA) and its involvement with the World Health Organization (WHO), we are working to establish international guidelines on basic safety and training in osteopa-

thy. Five years ago, the AOA proposed the OIA as a concept. Today, the OIA is an active coalition consisting of 43 osteopathic organizations from around the world. The coalition represents US-trained DOs, foreign-trained osteopaths who meet high training standards, and foreign-trained MDs who have additional training in osteopathic principles and manual medicine.

In late January, the OIA held its annual general meeting in London in conjunction with "Advancing Osteopathy 2008," a series of international conferences hosted by the UK General Osteopathic Council that attracted more than 1,300 DOs and osteopaths from 22 countries. As I emphasized in my March column, I was thrilled by the conference participants' obvious enthusiasm for OPP.

My recent trips abroad have been no less exhilarating. In late April, I traveled to Irbid, Jordan, to take part in the first joint medical conference between the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine of New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) in Old Westbury and the medical school of Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) in Irbid.

Barbara Ross-Lee, DO, NYIT's vice president for health sciences and medical affairs, keynoted the two-day conference, titled "Emerging Trends in Medicine," while Edward A. Gotfried, DO, the director of NYIT's Center for Global Health, served as its moderator.

I delivered a presentation on the US model of osteopathic medical education and spoke with Jordanian health officials on the importance of granting full practice rights to DOs. In addition, as an orthopedic surgeon, I gave a talk on complex wrist fractures.

Because my father was born in

Ramallah in the West Bank, I was especially proud to be shining the light of the osteopathic medical profession in the Middle East. Most Middle Eastern countries still do not recognize DOs as physicians.

The AOA applauds NYIT, which has a campus in Irbid, for its leadership in global health. The collaboration with JUST is just one example of NYIT's innovative partnerships that address international health concerns.

World Health Assembly

In May, I attended the WHO's 61st World Health Assembly in Geneva with Debra A. Smith, DO, a member of BIOMEA, and Joshua Kerr, the AOA's international program specialist. The assembly's opening ceremony began with a moment of silence for the victims of the earthquake in China and cyclone in Myanmar. As I write this column, the death toll for both disasters together surpasses 150,000—with millions of survivors left homeless.

The scale of these twin tragedies is so enormous that it is difficult to fathom. So much medical aid is needed. Where can we begin? But respond we must.

The American Osteopathic Foundation (AOF) already has a partnership with Heart to Heart International in China's Chengdu area, which was devastated by the earthquake. By Memorial Day weekend, Royce K. Keilers, DO, the AOF's vice president, was on his way to China to offer help to the earthquake survivors.

The World Health Assembly's wide-ranging agenda included such issues as pandemic influenza preparedness, the elimination of female genital mutilation, and climate change and health. I learned much about the health challenges of individual nations as repre-

sentatives from India, Pakistan, Iran, Swaziland and other countries presented reports.

While in Geneva, I met with the international director of Israel's Ministry of Health, thanking him for Israel's decision to grant full practice rights to US-trained DOs. I also met with the head of the Australian delegation to continue discussions aimed at establishing full practice rights for DOs in Australia.

In addition, I provided information on the osteopathic medical profession to delegations from such Middle Eastern countries as Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates. I also met with Syria's minister of health and listened to speeches by Jordanian Princess Muna al-Hussein and the Rev Desmond Tutu, now the archbishop emeritus of Cape Town. In recent years, the winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize has devoted himself to the campaign against human

immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome in Africa. Words cannot express the awe I felt listening to this hero.

MRI clinic in Malawi

On June 22, I will be arriving in Malawi to attend the opening of this country's first magnetic resonance imaging clinic in Blantyre—a medical turning point orchestrated by the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine (MSUCOM) in East Lansing through the generous sponsorship of General Electric Co and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Terrie E. Taylor, DO, a distinguished professor of internal medicine at MSUCOM, deserves most of the credit for the donation of the \$1 million MRI machine. For the past 20 years, she has spent January through June at Blantyre's Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, treating patients for malaria and

conducting research on the disease, which kills more than 1 million people annually in sub-Saharan Africa, most of them children under 5 years old. Dr Taylor is proof that even one individual can make a huge impact on world health.

Let's thank the many DOs who are making a difference overseas—whether they're practicing osteopathic medicine in countries that recognize the DO degree, volunteering for medical missions through DOCARE International and other humanitarian organizations, contributing to disaster relief efforts, serving international rotations, or lecturing on global health concerns. A.T. Still's light shines ever-brighter throughout the world.



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