

Orthopedic Surgeon Makes a Difference in Haiti and Chicago

Chicago, Ill. (Feb. 22, 2010) – For eight days, Daniel Ivankovich, M.D., laughed, cried, persevered and rarely slept as he tended to dozens of critically injured earthquake patients in Haiti’s tent cities.



In January, Dr. Ivankovich, an orthopedic surgeon at Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center in Chicago, and physician assistant, Tom Rosen, went to Haiti to care for survivors. The surgeon helped bring back two paralyzed spinal-cord patients to Chicago for care.

As of mid-February, both patients are doing well – with one patient going to a major Chicago rehabilitation hospital for care. The goal is to get them back to Haiti, because “patients heal best with families,” Dr. Ivankovich said.

Photo at right: *In Haiti, Dr. Ivankovich, orthopedic surgeon, talks with a young patient about his injury.*

In Chicago, Dr. Ivankovich oversees and treats poor patients in the orthopedic outpatient clinic at the Saint Elizabeth Campus. A joint and spine reconstruction specialist, Dr. Ivankovich also is on staff at Resurrection Health Care’s West Suburban Medical Center in Oak Park and Westlake Hospital in Melrose Park.

In Haiti, he was part of a team of 15 doctors, physician assistants, nurses and paramedics who went on the mission – bringing along 2,000 pounds of medical supplies, including gowns, caps, sutures, sterile supplies, antibiotics, drills and saws – much of it donated by Resurrection Health Care (RHC) and the team.

Phone call from a friend

It all started when Dr. Ivankovich received a phone call from a friend, a doctor from Florida, who asked him if he was interested in going to Haiti. The arrangements came together and he left on Jan. 21.

The team was stationed in the earthquake's epicenter in Port-au-Prince, but traveled miles to other locations to treat patients. Dr. Ivankovich tended to patients with fractures, crush injuries, abrasions and infected wounds – and performed amputations. Some patients were sent to the USS Comfort hospital ship for care; others were airlifted to U.S. hospitals.

“I stayed up for 20 hours a day,” said Dr. Ivankovich, who joined Saints Mary and Elizabeth in 2005. “It was physically and mentally exhausting – overwhelming to me.”

Patients stabilized, evaluated

“We'd get the spinal-cord patients stabilized and evaluate them, he said. Patients suffered from severe skin wounds, infections, collapsed lungs and other complications. More than 200,000 people died as a result of the Jan. 12 quake, according to the latest reports.

Dr. Ivankovich and his colleagues identified, triaged and provided care for about 50 spinal-cord patients. He teamed up with physicians from other countries to set up operating rooms, treat patients, arrange for emergency transports out of Haiti and get medical supplies to intended destinations.

The surgeon documented the trip by taking photos and writing on his blog at www.bonesquad.com. “It was therapeutic,” he said. “I cried every night.”

Needed urgent treatment

It was Dr. Ivankovich's goal to get two paralyzed spinal-cord patients to a major Chicago hospital serving as a midwest regional spinal cord center. The patients – a woman with a cervical spine injury (quadriplegic) and a man with a thoracic-spinal injury (paraplegic) needed urgent treatment.

In preparing to evacuate the patients, the surgeon spent a frustrating day on the phone – making calls to the consular office, border patrols and airlines. “I knew it was going to happen, I just didn't know when,” he said. On Jan. 28, the patients arrived in Chicago.

Had he ever done anything like this before? “I hadn't dealt with a natural disaster, it's devastating,” he said. “This is what I do every day in the city of Chicago.”

By that, he means treating patients of all ages with a wide range of orthopedic problems at Saint Elizabeth's outpatient orthopedic clinic.

Resurrection's mission

"People are walking among us (in Chicago) and can't get care – with the same needs and same problems (as those in Haiti)," he said. "I can provide care here because of Resurrection's mission."

Through this clinic, Saints Mary and Elizabeth makes it possible for Dr. Ivankovich to tend to needy patients with hand, foot, back problems and other conditions. "I'm a one-stop shop," he said. Dr. Ivankovich hopes the recent publicity about the Haiti mission trip also creates awareness about Chicago's poor – and results in donations and support for patients here.



Photo at right: *Tom Rosen, physician assistant, helps transport a group of spinal-cord patient via a flat-bed truck.*

In the meantime, he plans to return to Haiti in March, where he can continue to help patients who need prosthetic limbs, rehab and follow-up care. "There's a 10-year recovery there," he said.

In related news, on a separate trip, Victor Romano, M.D., orthopedic surgeon at West Suburban, and his physician assistant, Tom Hunt, spent a week in Haiti performing surgeries. To date, RHC staff and volunteers have contributed more than \$10,000 to agencies providing aid to Haiti. The RHC Mission Office also collected more than 30 boxes of clothes, food and medical supplies for Haiti.

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About SMEMC

SMEMC is part of Resurrection Health Care, which is a family of health care services providing advanced medical care and exceptional customer service with compassion and hope. Our hospitals, nursing homes, retirement communities, home health services, behavioral health programs and numerous outpatient services are conveniently located in many Chicagoland neighborhoods. Resurrection Health Care is one of the first hospital systems in the nation to receive accreditation by the Society of Chest Pain Centers (SCPC).

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